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The main stories…

What happened

The Burnham bounce

Andy Burnham continued his early policy blitz on Wednesday, by promising to find cross-party consensus on "fixing" the social care system. In a speech in London, the PM vowed to set up a National Care Service that will provide elderly people with free personal care at the point of need *(see page 4)*. Previous announcements had included a 20% cut to business rates for pubs and live music venues, and plans to give a share of income-tax revenue to metro mayors. In a busy first week in office, Burnham also met Ukraine's President Zelensky – his first international visitor since becoming PM.

"Value the hard hat"

On Tuesday, Burnham unveiled plans to shake up the education system, so that "Britain will value the hard hat every bit as much as the graduation cap". His proposals will allow pupils as young as 14 to study vocational subjects linked to the needs of local employers, alongside core subjects such as English, maths and science. The PM said his plans – which are modelled on the MBacc (Greater Manchester Baccalaureate) he launched while mayor of Manchester – will help lower the welfare bill, by offering young people clearer pathways into work.

What the editorials said

Burnham has made an "upbeat and politically polished" start, said The Guardian. True, his measures to assist pubs and help with the cost of living are modest. But they are a clever indication of intent, and signal that he understands that people need to have fun as well as pay the bills. By spending Friday at No. 10 North (Heron House in Manchester), he also showed that he is serious about moving power out of London. It might have been, he said, "the best day of my life".

Burnham's plans for schools make a lot of sense, said The Times. The failure of successive governments to improve skills-based learning is one reason we have a million young Neets in the UK. It has also contributed to the skills shortage that is constraining growth. The PM wants decisions about which skills are taught to be left to regional leaders, who are best-placed to know the needs of local firms. But that still leaves knotty problems. Arranging work placements for teenagers is not easy; many employers don't even have the necessary liability insurance. If Burnham wants to get more young people into work, there may be quicker ways than saddling schools with another set of reforms, said the Daily Mail. He could reverse Labour's employer's national insurance hike, for instance.

What happened

Fires rage across Europe

More than 375,000 people have been forced to flee their homes in France and Spain in the past fortnight owing to the major wildfires raging across southern Europe. In France, more than 42,000 hectares (420km²) have so far been burned in the Gironde region, where at least 240 homes have been destroyed, 93 firefighters injured, and more than 220,000 people evacuated. Roads have been jammed with cars as thousands of residents and holidaymakers fled the Cap Ferret peninsula.

A wildfire near Ávila, Spain

By Monday, the fire had advanced to within nine miles of the Bordeaux metropolitan area, home to more than a million people, forcing the evacuation of some neighbourhoods. Such was the size and intensity of the blaze that experts reported a rare phenomenon seldom before seen in Europe: "fire thunderstorms", or pyrocumulonimbi, which occur when wildfires develop their own weather systems, generating high winds and lightning strikes that spread the fires faster still.

In Spain, at least one person was killed, and around 105,000 forced to flee, as a wildfire with a 280km perimeter swept across the Madrid, Ávila and Toledo regions. Some 77,000 hectares (770km²) of desiccated ground were burnt. With the fires threatening the capital, the Spanish prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, declared a national emergency last Thursday. Across the EU, more than 254,388 hectares (2,544km²) have so far been burned by wildfires in 2026, according to official figures – still slightly below the 270,449 hectares recorded in 2025 (the worst year on record) but far surpassing the 20-year average of 138,000 hectares.

On Monday, Madrid's regional government said the situation had "improved slightly", and that wildfires had "slowed their advance". In France, firefighters said the blaze in the Gironde had also stabilised, but warned that it could take weeks, or even months, for it to be extinguished. Visiting the region on Monday evening, France's President Macron said the fires were "unprecedented" and had plunged the country into its worst crisis since the Second World War. With a new heatwave expected to push temperatures above 40°C later in the week, there was no imminent end in sight.

It wasn't all bad

In the early 1990s, two friends – both scuba divers – realised that overfishing and bottom trawling in the waters around Arran had devastated the seabed, and with it, marine life. So Howard Wood, now 72, and Don MacNeish, 79, launched a successful campaign for the Scottish government to ban fishing in much of Lamlash Bay. Now, the fruits of their work has become clear: a new study has found a three-fold increase in marine life on the protected seabed, and sea mosses are returning too.

British wildlife lovers have been promised a "painted-lady summer", a phenomenon in which millions of the colourful butterflies arrive in the UK to breed, as they make the 9,000-mile round trip from tropical Africa north to the Arctic Circle and back. No one butterfly does the whole trip: instead, it is completed over six or so successive generations. The butterflies are spotted in the UK every year, but every so often the conditions create boom years. In the last painted-lady summer, in 2019, the Big Butterfly Count recorded more than 420,000 sightings; in 2009, around 11 million were seen, in the largest influx for decades.

An 11-year-old girl from London has become only the second person in the world to have an innovative gene therapy for a rare condition that gradually robs children of their sight. The treatment involves removing the jelly from the eye, and injecting the retina with healthy copies of a gene to stop small cells in it from dying. Doctors hope that this will at least stabilise Catherine L'Estrange's vision, and possibly improve it. If it works, she said, "I will be able to carry on reading books, which is one of my favourite things to do."

COVER IMAGE: LILIAN AUFFRET/HANS LUCAS VIA AFP

What the commentators said

Relief on energy bills. Cuts to business rates for pubs. Cheaper public transport. Policy-wise, Burnham's agenda is a lot like Keir Starmer's, said Josh Glancy in The Sunday Times. But presentationally, the two leaders are poles apart. The PM married his flurry of announcements with a cleverly judged social media blitz in which he jogged with Mo Farah, discussed bar snacks with Chancellor John Healey, and chatted to a TikTok star known as "Bus Aunty". He understands that 21st century politicians have to "meet people where they spend most of their time", which – for large sections of the electorate – is on their phone screens.

Burnham has certainly made a good first impression on voters, said Tim Ross on Politico. Early polls suggest Labour is enjoying a "Burnham bounce", with voters from across the political spectrum warming to the new PM. For the first time in over a year, some polls even have Labour ahead of Reform UK. If the trend continues, it will fuel a debate over whether Burnham should "cash in", by calling a snap election. The last thing most of us want is "another dud PM", said Stephen Glover in the Daily Mail. But the fiscal realities are unchanged, and Burnham has yet to tell us how the giveaways he is planning will be paid for. Tax rises seem inevitable, and when voters are hit with these, his "spend, spend, spend" mantra may lose its shine.

Still, after years of Tory mismanagement, followed by the Starmer government's "fatalism", it's refreshing to hear a PM making the case that "something better" is possible, said Frances Ryan in The Guardian. But if he is going to achieve his ambitious goals, he'd better get moving, said Bagehot in The Economist. History tells us that governments take their most consequential steps "almost immediately or not at all". Nearly all of New Labour's lasting achievements – from devolution to an independent Bank of England – started to take shape within weeks of Tony Blair taking office. David Cameron set austerity in train at once; Boris Johnson's Brexit deal was struck on day 86. Burnham has said that he will unveil his ten-year plan for Britain "later this year"; but the most telling period of his premiership may already have begun.

What next?

Burnham's education reforms are due to take effect from 2028. In a related announcement, ministers said this week that some parents on benefits will be given up to £4,500 if their child takes an apprenticeship, to make up for the loss of child benefit when a 16- or 17-year-old leaves full-time education.

Higher borrowing costs and weaker growth forecasts have led the Government's fiscal buffer to fall to £10bn, down from £23.6bn in March, according to the Resolution Foundation. Another think-tank, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, has warned that sticky inflation caused by the war in Iran could leave a £24bn hole in government spending plans by 2030.

What the commentators said

"It is as if nature is biting back," said The Independent. From the Cairngorms, where wildfires have been burning for two weeks, to Bordeaux to Madrid, communities across Europe are being "forced to run for their lives". Although not every extreme event should be "lazily attributed to climate change", there is every indication that these fires are part of a terrifying long-term trend. But as Europe's wildfires worsen in "intensity, scale and duration", said The Guardian, its politicians are looking the other way. There are exceptions: Spain's Sánchez is "among the few" to argue that the EU's green transition should be accelerated. But in the face of "low growth" and other headwinds, Macron and Italy's Giorgia Meloni are among many others who now view climate measures as an "optional add-on, appropriate only when times are good". Rather than doing the real work – "funding adaptation efforts" and "driving the macro changes" needed to slow "global heating" – Europe's leaders appear "happy to fiddle while the continent burns".

It's a great pity that British opinion on the issue remains split along culture-war lines, said Tim Stanley in The Daily Telegraph. Those on the Left, who view it as some kind of "divine chastisement", impose "arbitrary deadlines" and pointless, self-flagellating measures. Many on the Right, meanwhile, react with "misplaced sympathy for the devil", telling themselves that fossil fuels are good and "renewables a joke". "Global warming – yes, we can call it that – is killing things conservatives claim to love", such as nature and farming. We need to "look out of our windows" and see what's happening. These "megafires" force us to "fundamentally rethink our relationship with the environments we have shaped", said Cynthia Fleury in Le Monde. The Landes forest which has burned in the Gironde is planted woodland: "a human creation". It will need to be replanted with climate-resistant species and new fire breaks; excess fuel will need to be cleared. What is burning is not just a forest, "but a way of inhabiting the land".

What next?

Meteo France predicted temperatures of up to 42°C (107°F) at the end of the week in some areas, while forecasters in Spain said that the heatwave there was expected to continue at least until Sunday.

Wildfires were also breaking out in Italy, Greece and Portugal, and the EU's crisis management chief warned on Tuesday of new blazes elsewhere. "Extreme conditions are looming for Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, in addition to France, the Iberian Peninsula, where the situation is expected to worsen," said commissioner Hadja Lahbib.

THE WEEK

Another bastion of Western manufacturing dominance has, it seems, crumbled. China's chipmaking giant Shanghai Yuliansheng has started production of deep ultraviolet lithography machines. These bus-sized devices, some of the most complex in human history, use lasers to imprint nanometre-sized circuits onto silicon wafer chips. Their manufacture was previously monopolised, at the cutting edge, by the Dutch company ASML. The latest news created turmoil on the markets *(see p36)*. It's the latest in a long line of Chinese triumphs, in everything from fridges and microwaves, batteries and telecoms hardware, to solar panels and electric vehicles. Last week's China shock was about Kimi K3, the new AI model, which rivals those of OpenAI and Anthropic at a fraction of the cost. China's manufacturers often aren't the best, but they're good enough, and they always win on volume and cost. Before April 2023, there were zero BYD or Jaecoo cars on UK streets. Look around now. In theory, in free market economics every nation specialises in its own areas of expertise, based on tradition, climate and so on; while state direction of resources is inefficient and bound to fail. But does such thinking work any more, when you consider the vast scale of China's state-backed research and industrial subsidies – its sheer critical mass? About 1.3 million engineers graduate in China every year; in the UK, it's 46,000. What will be left for the UK to make? Pop music? Artisanal cheddar *(see p40)*? Adam Smith, I fear, never planned for this.

Theo Tait

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Politics

Controversy of the week

Tackling social care

The PM at a care home in London this week

"Few issues show up the ugly deficiencies in our politics as badly as social care," said Sonia Sodha in The Times. For decades, successive prime ministers have dodged this growing crisis for our ageing society – ignoring the proposals of countless independent commissions and reviews, and shoving the issue into the "too difficult to broach" box. As a result, the English care system is now "totally broken". Anyone with assets over £23,250 has to fund their own care, with costs frequently running into the hundreds of thousands. Each local authority assesses cases differently, resulting in a postcode lottery that has left 2.5 million people without "the basic care they need". So it has taken a certain amount of "political bravery" on Andy Burnham's part to face this intractable challenge. This week, the new PM vowed to "put everything I've got" into fixing the problem – announcing he was speeding up Louise Casey's independent review into social care, and would chair a cross-party meeting to discuss urgent reform.

As Burnham observed, this crisis is putting the NHS under considerable pressure, said Druin Burch in The Spectator. "Across acute hospitals in England, roughly one bed in eight is occupied by someone with no medical need to be there", but who can't be discharged because they are waiting for a care home bed or for home help. In total, these beds take up the equivalent of 26 hospitals, said The Daily Telegraph. The situation leads to cancelled operations and "corridor wards". So something needs to be done. The best solution would be a private insurance-based system that allows people to pay into a fund covering their own care. Sadly, our "socialist Prime Minister" apparently favours mimicking our flawed NHS, with a free-to-use National Care Service. To pay for this reform, which would cost an estimated £18.7bn a year, Burnham has hinted that he might impose a new tax on all estates. In 2010, as health secretary, he proposed a flat rate of 10%, which was widely reviled as a "death tax".

A death tax? Bring it on, said Gaby Hinsliff in The Guardian. The fact is, "we're paying it already: it's just that nobody calls it that". My generation is now in its "caring years" – shuttling to hospital waiting rooms and dealing with "muddles over medication" while trying to bring up children and hold down a job. In England, the cost of not having proper care is "paid most obviously" in upfront fees: either for a nursing home (on average £5,192 a month), or for visiting carers (up to a pound a minute). But it's also paid in time, energy, relatives' own health and sanity, and sometimes their jobs. Burnham, whose father has Alzheimer's disease and isn't aware that his son is Prime Minister, no doubt has strong feelings on this issue. Sadly, that doesn't mean he'll succeed where others have failed, said Chris Smyth in the FT: Theresa May with her "dementia tax", David Cameron with his payment cap. There have been 22 attempts at social care reform in the past 30 years. All have failed.

Polanski's "mistake"
Reform UK has reported Zack Polanski, the leader of the Green Party, to the police, accusing him of "incitement to murder" over a post he shared on Instagram. In what he called an "inadvertent mistake", Polanski posted a photo from a party fundraising event in Bristol last week that showed a man wearing a black T-shirt with an image of a guillotine and the words: "We're only making plans for Nigel". Farage called for Polanski to be arrested, but Polanski, who took down the post, has refused to apologise to Farage, claiming that he had amplified the issue in a "fundamentally dishonest way".

Veterans' pensions
More than 1,000 veterans have been ordered to pay back tens of thousands of pounds each, because accounting errors had led to their pensions being overpaid. Those affected are members of the Armed Forces' final-salary pension schemes. In total, £5.1m was overpaid – in some individual cases by more than £100,000. Although the Ministry of Defence discovered the problem in November 2024, it only informed pensioners this year. Campaigners are calling for the overpayments to be written off.

Spirit of the age

The proportion of e-bike riders jumping red lights at busy urban junctions has risen to 54%, up from 45% last year, according to a new research project. The study, at 78 intersections in London, Manchester and Glasgow, found that while half of e-bike riders failed to stop at red lights, only 19% of pedal cyclists ran them (no rise on last year). The most dangerous junction was at Finsbury Park and Stroud Green Road in north London, where 86% of all bikes went through a red.

Today's TV viewers are as likely to turn to Netflix as to the BBC. Some 26% of viewers said that when looking for something to watch, they usually opened Netflix first; 25% went first to the BBC's TV channels or BBC iPlayer, according to a new Ofcom report.

Good week for:

London's West End, with new figures showing that mobile phone thefts in the area have fallen 50% over the past year. In Westminster, which includes the West End, "neighbourhood crime", including personal robbery and burglary, is down a third, according to the Met Police. Across London it is down 14%.

Bad week for:

The FA, which said it was "deeply concerned" by a proposal to invite private equity investors to buy stakes in the commercial and broadcasting operations of the World Cup (*see page 37*). In an effort to get the plan approved, Fifa's president, Gianni Infantino, is offering member associations an immediate payment of up to $20m each – a huge sum for many smaller associations. Infantino is himself expected to make many millions if the deal goes through.

British astronomy, with reports that the Jodrell Bank Observatory is likely to close, owing to funding cuts. The observatory, in Cheshire, is a Unesco World Heritage Site, and is dominated by the Lovell Telescope, which is the UK's largest.

Saltburn Cricket Club, which was engulfed in a bizarre cheating scandal after footage went viral of one its fielders clicking his fingers during a second-XI match against rival North Yorkshire team Norton. Allegedly, Brian Devine clicked his fingers when the ball passed the bat, so that the umpire would assume the batsman had nicked it and call "out" when the wicket-keeper caught it. Trawls of video footage of previous matches suggest the ruse has been used in multiple games by Devine – dubbed "Clicky Ponting", after Australia's legendary Ricky Ponting.

Poll watch

Labour has drawn level with Reform UK, with **22%** of the national vote share, up four points since Keir Starmer announced his resignation in June. The Conservatives are on **21%**. Support for the Greens has dropped from **15%** to **13%** since late June. *YouGov/The Times*

Only **44%** of 16- to 24-year-olds in England are satisfied with their lives, down from **62%** in 2010. *IPPR/UK Household Longitudinal Study*

Only **6%** of Britons said they would volunteer to fight in the face of an "imminent invasion". **52%** said they would be ineligible because of age or disability, **17%** said they would refuse to defend their homeland, and **14%** said they would agree to serve if they were called up. *YouGov/The Daily Telegraph*

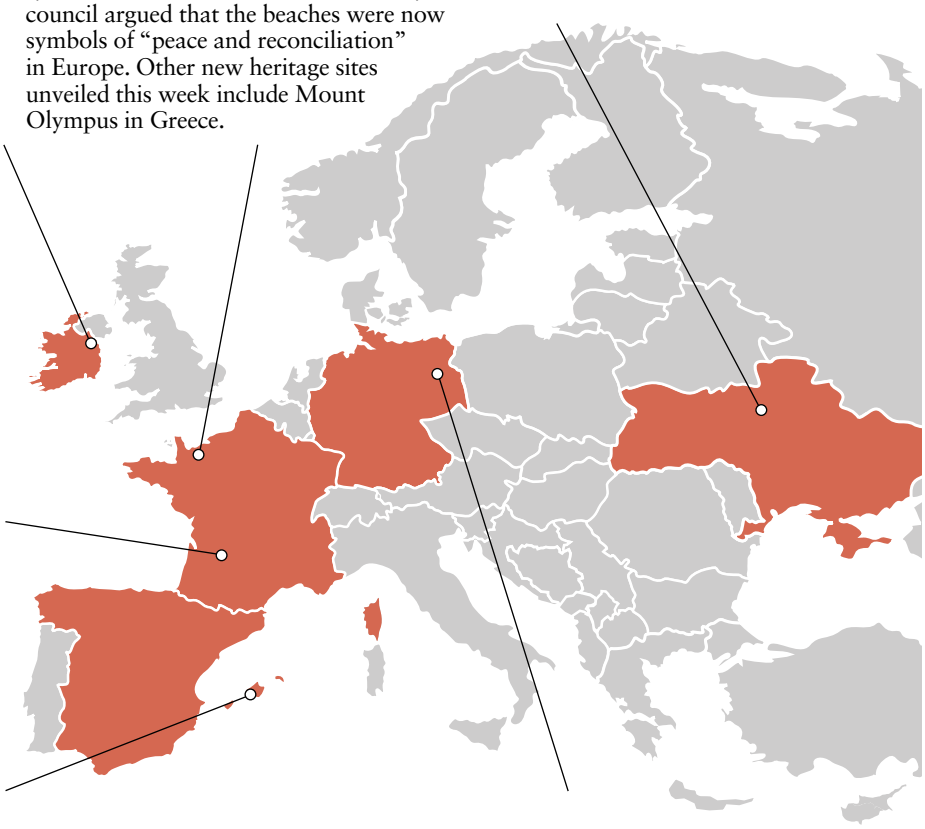
Europe at a glance

Carrickmacross, Ireland
Attack foiled: Irish police intercepted a car carrying what they described as a "highly sophisticated" bomb as it was travelling towards the border with Northern Ireland last week. The device, which contained a timer, a detonator and military grade Semtex, was found in a bag in the back of the car that had been pulled over outside Carrickmacross, in Co. Monaghan, as part of a counterterrorism operation. Police in Northern Ireland reportedly believe that it was going to be used by the New IRA – the largest republican paramilitary group still active – to attack a police station. The driver of the car, Isobella Perrie Sullivan, a 25-year-old law student, has been charged with possession of explosives. Simon O'Donovan, 44, a museum worker from Dublin, appeared in a court on Saturday to face similar charges. Sullivan's lawyers insisted that she had not known what was in the bag when she was asked to drive it across the border.

Caen, France
Unesco listing: The D-Day landing beaches in Normandy have become the first Second World War battlefields to be granted Unesco World Heritage status. Stretching for 50 miles along the Normandy coast, the five beaches – codenamed Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword – were the scene of the largest amphibious and airborne military operation in history, when more than 156,000 Allied troops landed on 6 June 1944. Their new status, which also applies to the Pointe du Hoc promontory, should help protect the coastline from development and new infrastructure such as wind farms, officials said. Unesco long resisted commemorating modern battle sites, saying that they were symbolic of division, but the Normandy council argued that the beaches were now symbols of "peace and reconciliation" in Europe. Other new heritage sites unveiled this week include Mount Olympus in Greece.

Kyiv
Drone strike: Ukrainian drones struck an Iranian ship in the Caspian Sea on Saturday, killing one sailor and igniting a war of words between Kyiv and Tehran. Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, who claimed it was a commercial vessel, called the attack "hostile and criminal" and vowed to retaliate. But the SBU, Ukraine's internal security agency, insisted the ship was carrying military equipment from Iran to Russia. Relations between the countries – previously stable and relatively amicable – have collapsed since Iran started supplying Moscow with Shahed drones and other weapons with which to attack Ukraine. Kyiv says that it has shot down more than 44,000 Iranian-designed drones since the start of the war in 2022.

Trémolat, France
Murder arrest: A 70-year-old woman has been charged with the murder of Karen Carter, the British-South African expat who was stabbed to death last year in the Dordogne village of Trémolat, where she had lived for more than a decade. The suspect, Marie-Laure Autefort, is a retired nurse who was arrested early in the investigation but later released. Prosecutors reportedly believe she was motivated by jealousy: Carter (pictured) had entered into a relationship with a retired French businessman who'd previously rejected Autefort's advances.



Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Tourist protest turns violent: Thousands of people took to the streets of Palma de Mallorca on Sunday to demand limits to the number of visitors to the island of Mallorca, and more affordable housing for locals. Anger about overtourism on Mallorca has been growing for years as visitor numbers have soared: nearly 34 million people passed through its airport last year, ten million more than a decade earlier, and property prices on the island, which has a population of under a million, have doubled. Police said the "Mallorca on the Edge" march was attended by 25,000 people; organisers put the figure at 70,000. The protest was mainly peaceful, but tensions rose when police closed off a route to the city's cathedral. A group of protesters allegedly threw stones, sticks and bottles at the police, who responded with rubber bullets and riot batons. Eight people were injured, none seriously.

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Berlin
Pride attack: The suspected perpetrator of last weekend's deadly attack at Berlin's Pride festival has been identified as an Islamist extremist who had recently been convicted of terrorism offences, raising questions about why he was not being more closely monitored and calls for tougher sentences. Abdul Ballout (pictured), a 21-year-old German with Lebanese roots, drove a van into crowds at Tiergarten park on Saturday, before attacking people with a large knife. A 65-year-old Polish woman was killed, and 29 other people were injured. He was shot dead by police the next day, following an overnight manhunt.

Last year, Ballout travelled to Lebanon, hoping to join Islamic State in Syria, but he was arrested in Lebanon and convicted by a military court there of inciting sectarianism. Repatriated, he was arrested on his return to Germany, and in May he was convicted by a court in Berlin of "preparing a serious act of violence". He was sentenced to 22 months, but spent no time in jail because his sentence was suspended. Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said it was "incomprehensible" that Ballout's movements were not being tracked; ministers have also ordered a review of how suspended sentences are handed out. The far-right AfD has accused the government of failing to tackle Islamist extremism and "migrant violence".

The world at a glance

New Brunswick, New Jersey
Cancer claims: The US healthcare giant Johnson & Johnson (J&J) has offered to pay $5.5bn to 76,000 claimants in the US who allege that its talc-based baby powder caused ovarian cancer *(see page 35)*. The firm removed the mineral from its products in the US in 2020 and worldwide in 2023, in response to accusations that they were contaminated with the carcinogen asbestos, seams of which are often found beside natural talc deposits. The claimants' lawyers argue that J&J knew about the risks for years, but covered them up. J&J has dismissed such claims as "meritless", but said it had made its $5.5bn offer in order to bring to an end a decade of litigation. If the settlement is approved, it plans to pay out the first $3bn next year. J&J also faces a lawsuit in the UK, where a case now involving over 7,000 claimants was filed against it and a former subsidiary in October.

New York City
ICC chief dismissed: The member states of the International Criminal Court (ICC) have voted to remove its chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, for sexual misconduct. The charges against the British barrister emerged in 2024: a female aide claimed he had made many coercive sexual advances, and a UN investigation has since found there was a "factual basis" for such claims. The ICC has come under mounting pressure ever since Khan secured an arrest warrant for Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu in 2024, after which the US imposed financial penalties and visa restrictions on ICC officials.

Washington DC
Biden tapes: Joe Biden was investigated in 2024 for mishandling classified documents after leaving office as vice-president. The investigator went on to clear him of criminal negligence on the grounds that a jury would see him as "a well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory"; but the release this week of recorded private chats he had in 2017 with the ghost writer of his memoirs has brought the matter to public attention again. In the chats, Biden allegedly discloses classified foreign material ("I just found all the classified stuff downstairs") and comes across as forgetful; he admits that he is "confused". Biden had sought to prevent the release of the chats, but had to relent after losing a two-year court battle.

Palo Alto, California
Odyssey drama: The tech billionaire Elon Musk has been so enraged by what he sees as the woke nature of Christopher Nolan's new blockbuster, *The Odyssey* – a film much lauded by the critics – that he's vowed to create a full-length feature film of his own to be generated with Grok Imagine, the AI platform created by his company xAI. Musk accuses Nolan of "pissing on Homer's grave" by, among other things, casting black actress Lupita Nyong'o (left) as Helen of Troy and trans actor Elliot Page as Sinon. His film, he insists, will be "historically accurate" and "true to the art of Homer".

Washington DC
Nuclear deal: Donald Trump's controversial multibillion-dollar nuclear energy deal with Saudi Arabia has been thrown into doubt, less than 24 hours after it was signed with fanfare in Washington. The agreement to build nuclear reactors with US technology over the next 30 years was slated by conservative outlets such as Fox News, and Trump has now said, in a post on Truth Social, that the deal will only go ahead if Riyadh recognises Israel under the Abraham Accords. Hitherto, Saudi Arabia has insisted it will only do that if Israel agrees to the creation of a Palestinian state. Trump also hinted that, in light of fears that Riyadh was intent on developing its own nuclear weapons, the US might now resile on its concession to let the Saudis proceed with uranium enrichment.

Washington DC
Renewed bombing: In an alarming escalation of the Middle East conflict, the US and Saudi Arabia this week carried out strikes against Iran-backed Shia militias in Iraq, which they believe have been targeting Saudi oil installations. Last week, the US had paused its bombing campaign against Iran – a lull in fighting that followed nearly two weeks of strikes – Donald Trump having been warned by senior officials of dwindling munitions stockpiles. The top US commander in the region, Admiral Brad Cooper, had reportedly said that little more could be achieved without resorting to major combat operations. Washington says the resumption of bombing was triggered by Iranian strikes against a US airbase in Jordan, and against three oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz that Iran claimed had deviated from approved routes.

São Paulo, Brazil
Diplomatic row: Relations between Argentina and Brazil sank to a new low this week, after Argentina's right-wing president, Javier Milei, called his Leftist Brazilian counterpart, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a "thief" and a "convict". Milei made the comments at a rally in São Paulo for his conservative ally Flávio Bolsonaro, who will stand against Lula in October's election in place of his father, the jailed ex-president Jair Bolsonaro. In response, Brazil recalled its ambassador to Argentina, saying it was unprecedented for a foreign leader to attack its president on Brazilian soil. Brazil will not accept anyone "sticking their nose where it doesn't belong", said Lula, whose 2017 conviction for corruption was overturned in 2021.

The world at a glance

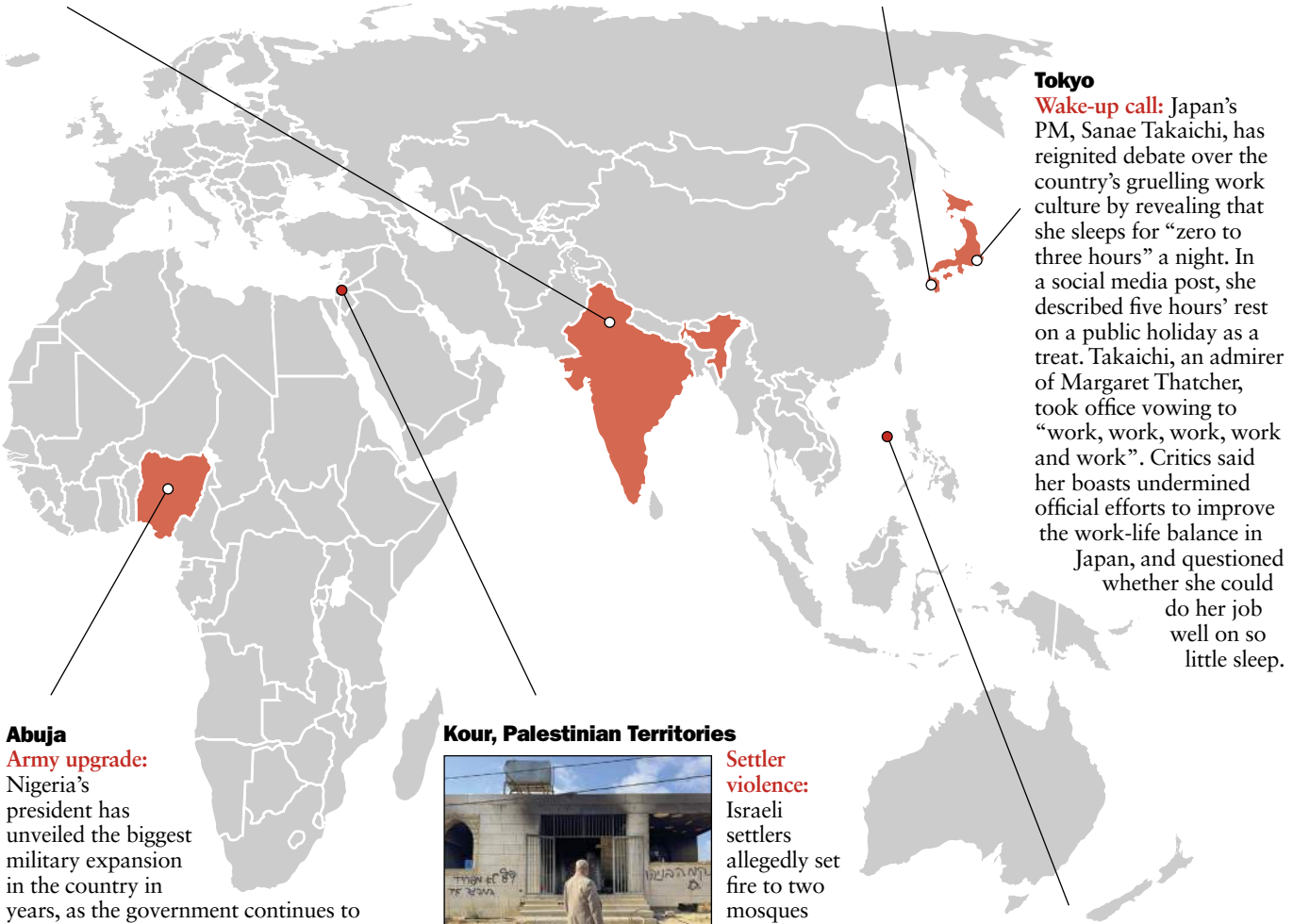
Delhi

Cockroach victory: India's strongman prime minister, Narendra Modi, capitulated last week to the demands of the youth-led Cockroach movement, by accepting the resignation of his education minister. Dharmendra Pradhan stepped down on Saturday over his failure to prevent the leaking for profit of intensely competitive national university entrance exams in May. As a result of the leaks, two million people had to resit the tests and 12 deaths by suicide were linked to the debacle. The Cockroach movement, which began online in May and later formed the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), had organised rallies in Delhi and other cities demanding Pradhan's resignation and broader reforms to the examination system. When huge crowds turned out in Delhi, in an unprecedented show of dissent against Modi's rule, police used tear gas and batons to disperse them, leading to allegations of police brutality and claims that the government was suppressing dissent.

The CJP called off the protests last week, when Pradhan resigned and Modi promised reforms to the exam system, but this week it threatened to restart them in response to a crackdown in which scores of its supporters have been arrested.

Kumamoto, Japan

Earthquake: At least 18 people were killed this week and dozens more injured after a 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck Japan's southern Kumamoto prefecture. The quake, the epicentre of which was close to the coastal city of Uto, caused buildings to collapse and roads to buckle, and led to widespread power outages in the middle of a heatwave. On Wednesday, rescue workers were racing against time to find survivors, including in the rubble of a shopping mall in the city of Kumamoto that partially collapsed on Tuesday following what may have been a gas explosion. Around 4,500 people are believed to have been inside the mall when the quake struck, an hour before the explosion. As scores of aftershocks hit, Japan's disaster management agency urged some 300,000 people to head to evacuation centres.



Tokyo

Wake-up call: Japan's PM, Sanae Takaichi, has reignited debate over the country's gruelling work culture by revealing that she sleeps for "zero to three hours" a night. In a social media post, she described five hours' rest on a public holiday as a treat. Takaichi, an admirer of Margaret Thatcher, took office vowing to "work, work, work, work and work". Critics said her boasts undermined official efforts to improve the work-life balance in Japan, and questioned whether she could do her job well on so little sleep.

Abuja

Army upgrade: Nigeria's president has unveiled the biggest military expansion in the country in years, as the government continues to battle multiple security threats – from Islamist insurgents, criminal gangs and armed groups. The plan, approved by Bola Tinubu, is to recruit 28,000 new soldiers, create four new army divisions (bringing the total to 12) and build three new military bases in the centre and northeast of the country – the areas bearing the brunt of the banditry, herder-farmer clashes and Islamist violence. Some 90% of Islamic State attacks now take place in sub-Saharan Africa, with a disproportionate amount in Nigeria. Most of the US troops deployed to the country to fight Isis withdrew last month.

Kour, Palestinian Territories

Settler violence: Israeli settlers allegedly set fire to two mosques in the Occupied West Bank last week, as tensions in the territory continued to escalate. The attacks in Qusra and Kour came days after clashes in the village of Tal, near Nablus, in which four Palestinians and two Israelis were killed. The violence was sparked when a group of settlers, some armed, entered the village and were confronted by residents. Hours later, Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu ordered a "wide-scale military operation"; in subsequent raids, including on a hospital, scores of Palestinians were arrested.

Scarborough Shoal

Coastguards clash: Chinese coastguard boats were filmed last week firing water cannon at two smaller Philippine craft near the Scarborough Shoal – a sandbar in the South China Sea that is claimed by both Manila and Beijing. As the Philippine government vessels, which were taking fuel supplies to fishing boats in the area, approached the Shoal, several Chinese vessels drew close and ordered them to leave, before firing high-pressure cannon at them. It was the third such confrontation in days. China claims almost all of the South China Sea, a major global trade route.

People

A rebel filmmaker
When he made *Halloween*, his 1978 low-budget slasher starring Jamie Lee Curtis, John Carpenter ripped up the Hollywood rulebook, by bringing horror out of gothic castles and gritty inner cities, and into the suburbs. It was a bold move, says Steve Rose in The Guardian; but the director had always been something of a rebel. His father, Howard, was an orchestral violinist and music teacher; and when John was five, the family relocated from Upstate New York so that Howard could take up a post at a university in Kentucky. "It was the Jim Crow South in the 1950s. Boy, were we fish out of water," says Carpenter. "Everything I know about evil I learnt in that small town of Bowling Green, Kentucky." Howard encouraged John to take up the violin; but the instrument only served to make him a target for bullies. "You're walking to school in the morning and you have a violin under your arm; these country boys in Kentucky decided I was great to beat up," he says. "I was a mark for violence." Miserable, he hooked into the 1960s counter-culture, and rebelled against everything: the town he grew up in, Vietnam, and "all forms of authority". Later, "Don't tell me what to do" became his filmmaking credo. He frequently clashed with studio bosses, and quickly lost control of the *Halloween* franchise. Still, he isn't complaining. "They had to pay me every time they made a movie. I sit on the couch and a cheque arrives in my hand. What's wrong with that? With all the rebellion in the world, I am a happy capitalist."

Toby Young's cancellation
Things have been going well for Toby Young lately. Having been made a peer by Kemi Badenoch, he enjoys spending time in the Lords; and he has an interesting job running the Free Speech Union, the not-for-profit he set up in 2020. Its aim, says Celia Walden in The Sunday Telegraph, is to combat "cancel culture" – something he knows all about. In 2018, he was appointed to the board of a new regulator, the Office for Students. By then, he had a lot of experience in education, having set up a free school. But he'd also made a lot of enemies during his other career as a right-wing media provocateur, and they were quick to dig up a host of controversial remarks he'd made over the years, on everything from the unattractiveness of working-class students at Oxford and women's breasts to eugenics. Soon, a "mob" of reporters was camped outside his house; he lost half a stone in two weeks. He felt obliged to resign from the post in question and other roles; his income fell by "half". Suddenly, "I was considered an unfit person to be involved," he says. He has come to see cancel culture as "a new religion", he says. "But unlike Christianity, this religion doesn't have any room for forgiveness. It doesn't distinguish between the sin and the sinner."

A star of Team GB, Amy Hunt won a silver in the 200 metres at the World Athletics Championships last year, and she is only the fourth British woman to have run 100 metres in under 11 seconds. Now, she has set her sights on a rather bigger prize, says Jeremy Wilson in The Daily Telegraph: she wants to become Britain's first female Olympic gold medallist in either the 100m or 200m. Has she always had this level of drive? "Oh yes, I love that element of putting on a show, being gladiatorial in the arena and receiving the cheers," she says. At school, she'd "race the boys" every lunchtime, and "I wanted to be on every sports team", she says. "There is a funny video of a race when I was younger, doing an indoor 60m [event]. It was me and seven boys who entered and I won." Usually, at the end of a race, all the competitors stick around, to shake hands; but the boys "just walked straight off. I felt quite embarrassed for them." With the 2028 LA Olympics fast approaching, the Cambridge graduate – who has previously described herself as an "academic badass and track goddess" – is training hard, confident that she can achieve her goal. "I like to live my life in a kind of radically optimistic way," she says. "I want to be Olympic champion, but I'm having fun. I think the world maybe needs more optimism and more happiness. And I think sport is such a tool to do that."

Castaway of the week

This week's edition of Radio 4's Desert Island Discs *featured the cinematographer Sir Roger Deakins*

1 *One of Us Cannot Be Wrong*, written and performed by Leonard Cohen
2* *Aqaba* by Bill Caddick, performed by June Tabor
3 *21st Century Schizoid Man (incl. Mirrors)* by Robert Fripp, Ian McDonald, Greg Lake, Michael Giles and Peter Sinfield, performed by King Crimson
4 *Soldier's Song*, written and performed by Lucinda Williams
5 *Bat Out of Hell* by Jim Steinman, performed by Meat Loaf
6 *The Island*, written and performed by Paul Brady
7 *Sun Comes Up, It's Tuesday Morning* by Michael Timmins, performed by Cowboy Junkies
8 *Isn't It a Pity* by George Harrison, performed by Nina Simone

Book: *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville
Luxury: fishing tackle

* Choice if allowed only one record

Viewpoint:
Back to the 1970s

"The Tories should be careful about saying that Andy Burnham will return us to the 1970s; a lot of people would vote for that. The three-day week, flying pickets, union barons and unburied bodies – they are a tiny part of a far larger picture. Other shocking features of the times were that almost everyone walked out of school into a job; that the streets were peaceful and patrolled by the police; that you could keep a family and house on one income; that most of the things you ate and drank or used were grown or made in Britain; that if you got into university you weren't forced into a lifetime of debt. In many ways it was a pleasing, comfortable era."
Peter Hitchens in the Daily Mail

Farewell

Gunther von Hagens, anatomist and *Body Worlds* creator, died 24 July, aged 81.

Louise Lasser, actress who starred in Woody Allen's early films, died 6 July, aged 87.

Ronnie Le Drew, Zippy and Muppet puppeteer, died 27 July, aged 78.

Bill Oddie, comedian and star of *The Goodies*, died 25 July, aged 85.

Paddy McNally, businessman and one-time boyfriend of Sarah Ferguson, died 22 July, aged 88.

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The Bayeux Tapestry

Nearly 1,000 years old, evocative, rich and ambiguous, the Bayeux Tapestry will soon be on show in the British Museum

Why is it so significant?

It "must be the only artistic masterpiece that is also a crucial source for a major historical event", wrote the medieval historian Patrick Wormald. The Bayeux Tapestry's survival, largely intact, is miraculous in itself. A strip cartoon-style rendering of the Norman Conquest, from 1064 to the Battle of Hastings, it is rich, evocative and astonishingly vivid. The tapestry is "not merely a record of conquest, but an incomparable mirror of medieval life", says the French scholar Lucien Musset. Colourful, graphically violent and occasionally ribald, it is rich in background detail, allowing us to look back nearly a millennium and see the world of the Anglo-Saxons and their Norman foes: their arms and armour, their ships, their cooking, their horses and dogs, their hairstyles (the English have flowing locks and long moustaches, while the Normans are cropped and clean-shaven).

"Colourful, graphically violent and occasionally ribald"

How was it made?

It is not actually a tapestry, but an embroidery: a linen cloth 50cm high and 68 metres long, showing 58 scenes embroidered with woollen yarn of ten colours, and captioned with brief Latin titles. When it first surfaced in history, in 1476, it was hung to decorate the nave of Bayeux Cathedral in Normandy every year at an annual feast. According to local tradition, it was made by William the Conqueror's wife Matilda and her ladies-in-waiting, but most scholars now think it was, in fact, commissioned in the 1070s by William's half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (and later Earl of Kent), who features four times (more than anyone except the main protagonists) and is seen rallying the troops at Hastings.

So is it a work of propaganda?

In outline, it tells the Norman version of the conquest, similar to that in the two main Norman chronicles of the period – framing it as a crusade against a perjurer. Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, crosses over to northern France in 1064, is captured by Count Guy I of Ponthieu and is rescued by William. Harold then swears an oath over holy relics, before returning to England and assuming the English crown upon the death of Edward the Confessor (his sister's husband, who died without a direct heir). William's case was that Harold had made, and broken, a sacred oath to support his claim to the English throne (this is how he gained the papacy's backing for his invasion). The tapestry shows Halley's comet – a bad omen – appearing above the newly crowned Harold. However, the tapestry is thought to have been made in England, probably in Odo's earldom of Kent, which was famous for its needlework: some designs match those in manuscripts in Canterbury. This could explain its sympathetic portrayal of the English.

How is it pro-English?

The Norman invaders are shown seizing the locals' food, and burning a house while an English woman, holding her son's hand, implores them to stop. Harold is portrayed without rancour, and with dignity, even heroism; he saves two Norman soldiers from a river while in France. The action starts with him, and he appears more times than William: one academic has even called it "the tragedy of Harold".

So it's subversive?

Arguably. Looking at the scene of Harold's oath, it could be interpreted as showing that it was extorted from him – as one early 12th century English source argued. It could even be said to endorse Harold's claim to the English throne. After his coronation, Harold is described as "Harold Rex", whereas the Domesday Book is careful only to call him Earl Harold. The Conqueror, by contrast, is never called "Rex" (only "Dux") in the tapestry, though this may be because the final section, presumably showing his coronation, was torn off and lost. The tapestry is, at the very least, enigmatic and ambivalent – it can be seen both as "a Norman brag and a Saxon lament", says art critic Jonathan Jones.

What about the background detail?

Along the top and bottom run decorative borders featuring scenes from fables, and of farming and hunting, along with a few naked human figures (there are at least five human penises). In one unexplained scene, "a certain cleric" is shown touching the face of a woman named as Ælfgyva. A priapic naked man squats below. And when the story reaches the Battle of Hastings, carnage from the battlefield spreads out onto the margin: decapitated bodies, severed limbs, looters stealing armour from the dead.

Has it always been in Bayeux?

Almost always. Antiquarians started taking an interest in the tapestry in the 1700s, and in the early 1800s it went to Paris, where Napoleon displayed it to whip up enthusiasm for an invasion of England. The final caption – *et fuga verterunt Angli* ("and the English turned in flight") – was added shortly before 1814, presumably for propaganda reasons. The Gestapo also took it to Paris during the Second World War: Heinrich Himmler then ordered it to be taken to "a place of safety" in 1944, but Paris was liberated before his order was executed. It then returned to Bayeux.

Why was the loan agreed?

For two main reasons: because its home, Bayeux Museum, is closed until October 2027; and because President Macron was determined to make it happen. Macron first proposed the loan in 2018; he joked that it has taken longer to sort out than Brexit. The Bayeux Museum's curator initially called it "unthinkable"; the risk of damage in transit led 78,500 people to sign a petition blocking the loan. But Macron insisted – knowing, said Peter Ricketts, who coordinated at the UK end, that the exhibition "would be a sensation". The Norman Conquest is, after all, just a detail in French history but central to Britain's national story.

The riddle of Harold's arrow

The tapestry's ten battle scenes mostly tally with other accounts: they show the Anglo-Saxons' shield-wall at the top of the hill, battered by Norman knights and arrows. But it is also a crucial source for the traditional story of how King Harold met his death, with the famous image of a Saxon warrior with an arrow in his eye, right below the words *Harold Rex interfectus est* ("King Harold is killed"). However, it is not entirely clear that that figure is actually Harold: he could be the next Englishman along, who has fallen and is being hacked at by a Norman knight. Although two 12th century historians also say his eye was pierced by an arrow, the earliest Norman sources do not mention it: the near-contemporary *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* says Harold was brutally dismembered by four knights.

Indeed, the arrow was likely added during an 1842 restoration. A 1733 sketch suggests that in its place before was actually a lance, held above the soldier's head. So the arrow may be a later embellishment: in medieval iconography, it was traditional for a perjurer to die with a weapon through the eye.

Best articles: Britain

Is taking on Trump "right for Britain"?

Anne McElvoy

The i Paper

"I will always put Britain's interest first." That's what our new PM declared in his first big BBC interview, says Anne McElvoy. Though Keir Starmer said much the same thing four months ago, Burnham says he'll "voice a different idea that is right for Britain" and is ready to call out Donald Trump. Really? Seeing how closely linked this country is to the US, both militarily and economically, it's not clear that falling out with its president, however disliked he may be by the Labour Left, is in the national interest. The "big-ticket items" in our defence arsenal (the F-35 jets from Lockheed, for example) are mass-produced in the US; and despite assurances that it has "nothing to do with Britain", the UK does play a role in the Iran crisis, not least by letting America use its bases here in its offensive against Tehran. Given also that the US "is a vital part of our trade geometry" and that any new tariffs Trump may impose could really hurt the economy, building trust with him may well be more "right for Britain" than antagonising him. "Ideological comfort zones these days often clash with geopolitical realities."

The sad death of shoe-leather democracy

Anoosh Chakelian

The New Statesman

"Strip-lit church halls, nicotine-yellowed disco balls, polystyrene cups of squash..." The assignment I loved most when starting out as a political journalist, says Anoosh Chakelian, was following MPs around their constituencies for a day. "Shoe-leather democracy" in action. I'd watch them chat to constituents in the street. I'd listen to kids in local schools give the MP a good grilling. I'd marvel at the sight of Ken Clarke tucking into "gammon, eggs and chips at a roadside pub". Those days are gone: MPs now fear for their safety. Ann Widdecombe is but the latest in a long list of political figures who've suffered or been threatened with extreme violence, often when going about their local rounds. And the result has been a dramatic decline in home visits and drop-ins. MPs are less and less inclined to use public transport, or to advertise ahead of time where an advice surgery is to be held. The closeness to the people of our supposedly out-of-touch politicians, who still spend time every Friday talking to constituents, has been a remarkable feature of British political life. And we're losing it.

Britain's old and young are miles apart

Tom Calver

The Sunday Times

One of the widest chasms in British politics today, says Tom Calver, is the divide between "Boomers and Zoomers". Take the pensions triple-lock: over 90% of the over-65s want to retain it; the young adults of Generation Z oppose it. But this divide shouldn't just be seen as a fight over pensions, housing and taxes. It's the result of the generations growing ever wider apart in their viewing, listening and reading habits. Back in 1986, over half the population, young and old alike, tuned in to watch the *EastEnders* Christmas special. Today, they live in separate cultural worlds and inhabit entirely different "echo chambers". The over-65s watch broadcast TV to much the same extent as they did 15 years ago: TV viewing by 16- to 24-year-olds has fallen from 171 minutes a day to just 36. The Boomers' top news sources are still BBC TV and radio, and ITV: the Zoomers get their news from Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook and X. Boomers are well aware of Labour's new policy initiatives; Zoomers generally aren't. What we are witnessing is the disappearance "of the shared news, events and spaces that once gave generations a common view of the world".

How our politics have gone American

Stephen Bush

Financial Times

Have you seen the short video of our PM and his Chancellor sharing a packet of pork scratchings in a pub? Or the video of him chatting to Gary Lineker? One of Andy Burnham's greatest assets, says Stephen Bush, is that, unlike Keir Starmer, he's very good at social media. His output on Instagram and TikTok sends out a signal that Labour has changed and that traditional journalism no longer matters. Hitherto, politicians seeking a media audience had to subject themselves to "pesky questions" from interviewers. This new form of political promotion no longer requires that trade-off. It effectively negates all the regulations on political advertising, which has never been allowed on commercial TV or radio. But if Burnham can now sell himself to voters without being scrutinised, the same is true for other social media-savvy politicians like Nigel Farage or Rupert Lowe, who can now savage Burnham without any comeback from his side. Slowly but surely our politics is coming to resemble that of the highly polarised US, where political advertising is ubiquitous and its politicians experience neither "the pain of scrutiny nor the consolation of a rebuttal".

IT MUST BE TRUE... I read it in the tabloids

An Italian fraudster has been jailed for building a fake Roman amphitheatre and charging tourists €40 to visit it. Franco Malosso, 69, claimed to have discovered the ruin near the city of Vicenza following a landslide in 2005. He had built steps out of aged stone and columns out of fibreglass and papier-mâché; he said that it dated back to AD393, and that Julius Caesar, Cleopatra and Shakespeare's Juliet had visited it. Following a long legal battle, Malosso has now been jailed for over two years.

A Quaker chaplain who is a dead ringer for the new prime minister has taken to calling herself "Mandy Burnham" on social media, reports The Sun. Emma Roberts, 54, a rugby and real-ale fan from Swansea, has the same haircut, brows and thick specs as Andy Burnham. On a recent Zoom call with her family, she mentioned that people had been saying she looked like Burnham. "And my own mother said, 'For 20 minutes I've been thinking the same,'" said Roberts.

The governor of a Turkish province has been fired following criticism of his tight cycling clothes. Mehmet Fatih Çiçekli was dismissed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Turkish president, two weeks ago. No official reason was given, but it came soon after Çiçekli's social media photos of himself wearing Lycra prompted a backlash. İnan Akgün Alp, of the opposition CHP, complained: "He goes around among citizens wearing cycling tights all day. That's no way for a governor to behave." Çiçekli defended his outfits, saying: "I do sports in sports clothes."

The rage against data centres: New York fights the future

"Whoever owns AI owns the future." That's what New York's Democratic governor, Kathy Hochul, used to tell us, said The Washington Post. Well now she's just made sure "it won't be New York". Last month, she imposed a one-year moratorium on the building of large data centres: until she's developed a new regulatory regime to cushion the strain they put on the energy grid, the state's Department of Environmental Conservation won't issue any permits. Madness. Data centres are "the lifeblood of AI; they give America its "narrow" edge over China in the AI race. Hochul once agreed with that. Now she is bowing to the "Luddites on the Left" – people such as Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders – who are seeking to halt new data centres nationwide.

An Amazon Web Services data centre in New Carlisle, Indiana

On the contrary, Hochul's moratorium is the "right move – and a politically savvy one", said Sara Pequeño in USA Today. The AI lobby claims such centres will "bring jobs and economic activity"; the voters are more concerned that these "gigantic eyesores" will bring noise and air pollution, use up tons of water, and cause electricity bills to soar. They want regulations that will reduce the harm to local communities – which is exactly what Hochul is giving them. More Democrats should follow her example, said Tressie McMillan Cottom in The New York Times. In this "virulently partisan" era, "rage against data centres" is the one issue that unites voters – be they eco-activists, soccer moms, farmers or hardcore Maga types. If Democrats can harness this energy and "anti-establishment sentiment", they could create "a political movement that wins elections."

The resistance isn't just based on Nimbyism, said The Economist. A recent Pew survey found that "Americans who had merely heard of data centres" are "just as opposed as those who live within five miles of one". It's all down to what these data centres represent: a world in which AI "dooms humanity by hoovering up all its resources and paving Earth with servers". And given how the Tech Bros have fanned fears of AI throwing masses out of work, it's not surprising that people want to slow down the onslaught of the AI infrastructure arriving on their doorsteps. It's amazing how quickly the mood has changed, said Tim De Chant in TechCrunch. A year or two back, states were eager to secure these new developments; all that has changed now that public sentiment towards them has soured. The public's big fear is that their voracious appetite for power will drive up electricity prices. Electricity demand from the centres is expected to quadruple by the end of 2035, by which time it's forecast they'll be using one fifth of all the electricity generated in the US.

Yet in pandering to such fears, Hochul is "blocking development that would benefit" the people of New York state, said The Wall Street Journal. She should have the courage to admit that it is the state's green mandates and reluctance to build new generation plants that have degraded the state's electricity supply and caused prices to rise – not AI data centres. And she should make it plain that data centres can "deliver a property tax windfall" along with thousands of jobs. What we have here is "fracking all over again", said the New York Post. After banning fracking "on the basis of bogus environmental concerns", New York lost out on "tens of thousands of jobs and literally trillions in wealth", which all went next door to fracking-friendly Pennsylvania. Same thing's now happening with billions of dollars in investment which are now going to AI-friendly Pennsylvania. And all because "New York is banning progress".

The end of reading is upon us

Rose Horowitch

The Atlantic

Some 2,000 years ago the great Library of Alexandria – repository of the premodern world's greatest written works, possibly including Aristotle's own book collection – was destroyed. Its disappearance, widely regarded as the greatest loss of knowledge in history, ushered in the dawn of a new dark age. And now, two millennia on, "the darkness is gathering again", says Rose Horowitch. No great act of destruction has taken place, but once again people are ceasing to read. The evidence is all around. In 2022, a survey by the National Endowment for the Arts found that fewer than half of US adults had read a book of any kind in the course of that year. The proportion of Americans who say they read for pleasure has fallen from 28% in 2004 to just 16%. Reading skills in US schools are in sharp decline. Less than 10% of twentysomethings now read newspapers; some 50% did in 1975. We now live in a world of drastically reduced attention spans, the world of social media, short-form videos and reliance on AI. And yes, all these inculcate distinctive skills of their own. But reading is more than a skill: it is the foundation of reflective thinking. It facilitates "the higher-order abilities of comprehension and synthesis". It shapes our innermost thoughts, our politics, our culture. Or rather, it did. For it now seems that the literate era was just "a brief interlude" between the oral and digital.

Making diarrhoea great again

Ryan Cooper

The American Prospect

The latest impact of the chainsaw the Trump administration has applied to federal health agencies can be heard in "bathrooms across the country", says Ryan Cooper. Massive cuts to federal health agencies by Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr and Elon Musk's Doge have already contributed to outbreaks of screwworm and measles. Now, more than 9,000 Americans are miserably ill with cyclosporiasis, a disease that can trigger weeks-long, uncontrollable diarrhoea. It's caused by a foodborne parasite that usually occurs from "improper sanitation at farms or food-processing facilities". Scientists speculate that this outbreak, the worst in US history, is connected with iceberg lettuce imported from Mexico and supplied by Taylor Farms. But they can't be sure because, last year, Kennedy ordered the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention to scale back cyclospora monitoring, and CDC budget cuts of 25% have seen the sacking of experienced staff, slowing the federal response and making it harder to track down the source of the infection. With the Food and Drug Administration down more than 4,000 employees,"food safety inspections have been going undone". Thanks to Trump's chainsaw, thousands of us are left with a nasty case of the runs.

Best articles: International

Hamas chooses its new leader: bad news for Trump?

The Islamic Resistance Movement, better known by its Arabic acronym Hamas, is facing one of the "most turbulent moments" in its 39-year history, said Sally Ibrahim in The New Arab (London). Over the past three years, in retaliation for the Hamas terror attacks of 7 October 2023, Israel has killed thousands of its soldiers and assassinated many of its senior officials. In July 2024, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed in an Israeli strike in Tehran; three months later, his replacement Yahya Sinwar, architect of the 7 October massacre, was slain by Israeli troops in Gaza. And for almost two years after that, a five-man leadership council based in the relative safety of Qatar took over. But last week, in a sharply contested vote, a new overall Hamas leader was elected. He is Khalil al-Hayya, one of the Qatar five, who has been the chief negotiator in the indirect talks with Israel and who will now have to deal with the huge challenges ahead for Hamas: "rebuilding its command structure, redefining regional alliances and preparing for an uncertain postwar reality in Gaza".

Khalil al-Hayya: an "increasingly hardline stance"

Despite the heavy losses Hamas has suffered during the war, its institutions are still functioning, said Quds News Network (Jerusalem). The very holding of this leadership election testifies to that. True, it was meant to have been over by March. But given the complexity of the election process, it's quite a feat to have held it at all. Hamas was founded in 1987, after the Muslim Brotherhood group in Gaza reconstituted itself as the Islamic Resistance Movement. And like Brotherhood groups elsewhere, its political bureau and its chief were selected by a Shura Council, its members representing different parts of the Gaza Strip. Today, the leader is still chosen by a Shura Council, only now the members are drawn from four separate blocs: Gaza, the West Bank, Israeli jails and the Palestinian diaspora.

It was certainly impressive for Hamas to have collected Shura votes during a war, said Jack Khoury in Haaretz (Tel Aviv), but the result only serves to reveal the deep divisions within the group. The new leader, Hayya, is strongly pro-Iran and backs armed struggle to the hilt. He won his razor-thin victory on the back of votes cast by the "Gaza faction" in the Shura Council. The man he beat, by 35 to 34 votes, was former Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, who has lived abroad for decades and is known to be a lot more pragmatic. Some Hamas officials even claim he expressed reservations about the 7 October attacks. Meshaal's "diaspora faction" favours closer ties with Sunni Muslim countries such as Qatar rather than the "Axis of Resistance" led by Shia Iran. So although Hayya's group is in the ascendancy, Hamas's internal dispute "is far from over".

The pro-Iran camp in Hamas used to be a "small minority", said Azzam Tamimi on Al Jazeera (Doha), which is why Iran's efforts to turn it into a proxy like Hezbollah for a long while came to nought. But all that changed when Hamas, under Meshaal's leadership, backed the Arab Spring protests of 2011. Overnight, financial donations from Arab governments dried up, and Iran later stepped into the breach. And since 2015, most Hamas leaders have chosen to follow Iranian jihadism, putting the Meshaal faction "in a minority", said Carlo Panella on Linkiesta (Milan). The new choice of leader simply confirms the movement's "increasingly hardline stance". Hayya – four of whose sons have been killed in Israeli strikes – is adamant that Hamas will only give up heavy weapons to mediators if Israeli-backed militias in Gaza disarm first. Yet under the US-brokered peace plan, Hamas had pledged to transfer power in Gaza to a Palestinian technocratic committee. So the new choice of leader is bad news for Donald Trump.

And for many of those living in Gaza it's an irrelevance, said Al Jazeera. "It does not make a difference to us," 28-year-old Ali Abu Amshi, who has lost 22 family members in the war, told the news network. "We want to live. We want crossings to reopen, we want to eat, drink and have a normal life."

RUSSIA

Moscow has finally declared war

Kronen Zeitung (Vienna)

For four years, Russia repeatedly insisted its invasion of Ukraine was just a "special military operation" – people were actually sent to jail for using the W-word. Yet recently, says Christian Hauenstein, Vladimir Putin has taken to explicitly calling the conflict "war", and his Kremlin spokesperson has followed suit. This isn't mere semantics; it is likely as not "intended as a warning". Russian defence doctrine explicitly allows the use of tactical nuclear weapons during a regional war, and there are signs everywhere that Russia has reframed the conflict as a war against Europe, not just Ukraine. According to Lithuania's president, Gitanas Nauseda, intelligence assessments indicate that Russia is planning to attack "critical infrastructure" in a Nato member, probably Poland or one of the Baltic states. And for weeks now, Moscow has been falsely claiming that the Baltic states have involved themselves in the war by hosting Ukrainian drone stations or by assisting in drone guidance. It has also been probing Nato defences: a Russian bomber recently buzzed a Nato carrier group in the Norwegian Sea, dropping sonar buoys to find out where Nato submarines might be. Yes, "one could dismiss this indirect threat as a mere bluff". But Nato needs to be ready if it's not.

JAPAN

A simple way to save our royal family

Mainichi Shimbun (Tokyo)

No two ways about it, says the Mainichi Shimbum, Japan's imperial family could soon fade away. Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako only have one child – 24-year-old Princess Aiko, and she can't inherit the Chrysanthemum Throne. Why? Because under rules introduced in 1889, only boys from the male line are eligible. As the royal family has produced far more daughters than sons of late, this constitutes a major problem. So to head off a looming succession crisis, Sanae Takaichi, Japan's first female PM, has suggested the emperor should adopt the male heirs of distantly related families who've left the imperial household. But why resort to such a finicky solution? Why not just open the monarchy up to women? Japan used to have female empresses: Go-Sakuramachi, the last of them, ruled from 1762 to 1771. The constitution says the emperor's authority comes from "the will of the people", and in Japan today, people have grown used to women taking on important roles. Our PM's fixation with the royal male bloodline is not only wrong, it's completely "out of step with the times".

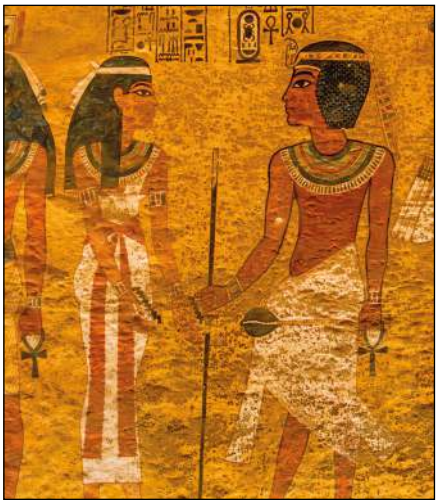
What the scientists are saying…

An exoplanet with an atmosphere

Since the first exoplanet was detected in 1992, astronomers have spotted dozens of rocky planets orbiting in the habitable zones of distant stars – regions where it is neither too cold nor too hot for life to be possible. Now, for the first time, one of them has been found to have an atmosphere. The discovery, based on signs of helium leaking into space, represents the strongest evidence yet that Earth-like worlds exist beyond our solar system. Formed by a layer of gas that surrounds a planet, an atmosphere shields the surface from radiation, insulates it from extreme temperatures, and maintains the pressure needed for water molecules to stay together as liquid. It is, therefore, essential to "support life as we know it", said lead author Dr Collin Cherubim of Harvard University. The planet in question, LHS 1140 b, lies some 48 light years away, and orbits a red star that is cooler and smaller than the Sun. Its diameter is 70% bigger than Earth's and its mass five times greater, making it a super-Earth. The challenge now will be to work out the precise composition of its atmosphere, as helium alone cannot support life, and to search for signs of liquid oceans on its surface.

Whale chat alters when ships pass

Scientists who have spent years listening in to the chatter of sperm whales in the Caribbean Sea around Dominica have found that it changes when noisy boats are nearby. The sequences of clicks, or codas, that whales use to communicate become more compressed, because the interval between clicks is shorter; and some of the vowel-like sounds the clicks make change. The study was based on recordings collected over four years from acoustic tags attached to 15 whales, with around 1,000 codas analysed in total. When background noise was detected, the team used other data to confirm that ships had been present. They found that the whales did not just speed up their codas when the ships passed by, they also used more A-type sounds. It could be that the whales are changing the way they "speak" to take account of the background noise, said Dr David Gruber, the founder and chief executive of Project Ceti (the Cetacean Translation Initiative), just as humans alter their pitch, enunciation and volume in noisy rooms; but it could also be that they are talking about the shipping.



Who are you calling a princess?

Egyptian princesses were archers

In ancient Egypt, royal women were sometimes buried with bows and arrows, maces and even daggers – weapons associated with elite male warriors. When these grave goods were found, millennia later, they were assumed to be symbolic: a dagger might have represented protection in the afterlife. But analysis of six 4,000-year-old skeletons, found alongside such goods under the pyramids of Dahshur, has indicated that some Middle Kingdom princesses were buried with weapons that they used. Analysis of the skeletons, four of which belonged to the daughters of a pharaoh, showed signs of ligament damage consistent with pulling back the string of a bow repeatedly, over the course of many years. And one who had been buried with a highly ornate dagger had signs of upper-body strength consistent with regular use of such a tool. The researchers also found that the women had suffered multiple fractures and other injuries, indicating involvement in physically demanding activity. "Their bones developed in ways that reflect sustained, heavy muscle use, directly matching the weapons discovered in their tombs," said lead researcher Dr Zeinab Hashesh of Beni-Suef University.

Epidurals do not harm babies

Having an epidural to relieve pain during labour does not pose any significant risk to the baby, researchers have found. The study was based on nearly half a million births in Scotland between 2007 and 2019. All were either vaginal or unplanned C-sections. Around 23% of the women had an epidural – in which a catheter, inserted into the lower back with a needle, delivers drugs to the nerves in the epidural space (just outside the spinal cord) to stop pain signals reaching the brain. Having looked at the outcomes, the researchers concluded that epidurals were not "associated with clinically significant risks of harm to newborn babies or children, including risks of neonatal morbidity, death or cerebral palsy". That being the case, they advised that epidurals be offered more routinely.

Orangutan mothers make "playdates"

Female orangutans will travel long distances so that their young can have "playdates", a study has found. Play is an essential form of socialisation across mammal species, but orangutans are semi-solitary animals, and females give birth to single infants that they raise alone for five to six years. To investigate how much infant apes manage to socialise, a team from the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behaviour looked at 30,000 hours' worth of observations of mother-infant pairs in a forest in Borneo, taken over 15 years.

Females raise their infants alone

This revealed that those with infants of a similar age spent a disproportionate amount of time in the same areas; and that, before and after these apparent meetings, they had travelled further than usual, as they ranged into one another's territory. The researchers wondered if the meetings were coincidental – the mothers could have gathered there simply because the area had an abundance of food; but they found the meet-ups happened regardless of food availability. In fact, the travelling left the mothers with less time to forage, suggesting that they are making sacrifices to increase their offspring's access to social play with their peers.

Don't say please to AI

Should we be polite to AI chatbots? Some users mind their Ps and Qs, because they are worried that, if they don't, they'll be singled out for punishment when advanced AI takes over. Others simply think that if we forego basic levels of civility in our conversations with a non-sentient algorithm, the rudeness will spill over into our real-world interactions. But UN researchers have now urged AI users to be less polite – to save energy. They have calculated that if all the pleases, thank-yous and other unnecessary words were cut from AI prompts, it would save 87 to 98 gigawatt-hours of energy a year – enough to power some 31,000 UK homes. So instead of saying "Hello, please could you give me three main causes of the English Civil War; I need a list for my history homework," the user should simply type "English Civil War, list three main causes."

Talking points

Pick of the week's *Gossip*

Not every football fan is devoted to Gianni Infantino, but Donald Trump apparently believes that the Fifa president would be the perfect candidate to replace António Guterres as secretary-general of the UN. According to the New York Post, Trump – who has known Infantino (pictured) for years, and who was awarded a special Fifa Peace Prize last year – says that the Fifa boss is "respected by everyone around the world", and "has a special ability to bring people together". The White House has not confirmed the story, but one of Trump's envoys, Paolo Zampolli, said: "Only President Trump could have such a genius idea."

Labour MP Stella Creasy was much mocked last week, when she posted footage on social media of one of London's thousands of ring-neck parakeets, and asked if anyone in Walthamstow had lost their parrot. Soon, her followers were posting their own missing pet appeals: one asked if anyone had seen their "overweight pug", above a picture of a hippo.

Nigel Farage enjoyed a moment of "instant karma" last week, when a female driver slowed down to swear at him on a street in his Clacton constituency – and immediately crashed her car. As the woman was busy shouting "wanker" at the Reform UK leader, she failed to notice that the BMW ahead of her had stopped at a red light, and she duly drove into the back of it. A video recorded by Reform UK shows aides and supporters enjoying the scene from the pavement; in the background, one can be heard saying: "She won't be doing that again in a hurry."

Energy: the crisis facing the new minister

Miatta Fahnbulleh, the new Energy Secretary, is sometimes referred to as "Burnham's brain", said John Rapley on UnHerd. The MP for Peckham, who came to Britain as an asylum seeker from Liberia aged six, has a doctorate from the London School of Economics, and is an expert on industrial and green policy. She'll need all her intellectual resources to deal with the "big decisions" facing her: "how to bring down energy bills about which consumers and businesses alike have been screaming; and how to reconcile that imperative with her commitment to net zero and the phasing out of fossil fuels". The oil industry, unions – and even, reportedly, Andy Burnham himself – are pushing for more drilling to be approved in the North Sea, which could create jobs and provide local gas to replace imports. However, such benefits would be mostly "short-term": the most effective way to bring down bills in the longer term, and to reduce emissions, is to "double down on renewables" and drive expensive gas out of the UK system.

Fahnbulleh: "big decisions"

Under Fahnbulleh's predecessor Ed Miliband, net-zero policy was based on this misconception, said The Times: that there are "no trade-offs" in pursuing a speedy transition to renewables. In fact, renewables have serious drawbacks: they are intermittent, not as cheap as their cheerleaders claim, and require a much more complex grid than the old system that used only big power stations. We were given a taste of the problems involved last week when a report was leaked from the National Energy System Operator, which runs the National Grid. It found that, because there are now so many small energy providers – wind farms, solar panels, batteries – it is hard to assess energy supply and to balance it with demand. During the June heatwave, the grid repeatedly came close to blackouts.

More worrying still, 20% of the world's supply of liquefied natural gas "remains trapped on the wrong side of Hormuz", said Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in The Daily Telegraph. Britain has little gas storage of its own, and inventories in Europe are critically low. Fahnbulleh ought to tell us soon how "she plans to address a national energy crisis". Approving the large Jackdaw gas field 150 miles off Aberdeen, which is "basically ready to go", would help. The Government is expected to approve some "tiebacks" – new gas and oil fields linked to existing production facilities – next month, said Jim Armitage in The Times. This, however, will come at a political cost: it will infuriate some 60 green-minded Labour MPs on Fahnbulleh's wing of the party.

Prisoner releases: a dilemma for the PM

In 2019, PC Andrew Harper was responding to a call about the theft of a quad bike in Berkshire when his foot got caught in the tow strap of the suspects' car as it sped off. He was dragged for 1.6km, suffering fatal injuries. The three teenagers in the car were later convicted of his manslaughter; the two who were passengers were sentenced to 13 years. After that, said the Daily Mail, Harper's widow successfully campaigned for the killers of emergency workers to get mandatory life terms; but Harper's Law doesn't apply retroactively, and last week it emerged that those two men may be released on licence early, under the 2026 Sentencing Act. It allows for all non-violent offenders, and violent ones jailed for less than four years, to be released when they've served 33% of their terms, and for those serving more than four years for violent and sex crimes to be released at the 50% mark. Only a few categories of serious offender are excluded, including those serving life terms.

Countless victims of crimes including rape and child sex abuse have been informed that their attackers are to be freed earlier than anticipated. Inevitably, they are appalled and feel betrayed, said David Shipley in The Spectator. Faced with a public backlash, Andy Burnham has paused the Act's implementation. But it is not clear what he can do. Prisons in England and Wales have been dangerously close to capacity for years. No sooner had Keir Starmer come to office in 2024 than he was faced with warnings that the system was about to collapse, prompting a controversial early release scheme in which many offenders were let out at the 40% mark. People blamed successive Tory governments for bringing in tougher sentences and raising automatic release thresholds, while failing to increase prison capacity: in 14 years, they added just 500 new places. Labour has pledged to create 14,000 more, but even if they manage that, these prisons won't be ready in time to avert a crisis – hence the new Act, which lowers release thresholds again. It also expands the range of offences they apply to, because releasing only non-violent offenders would not free up enough space.

Ultimately, the system needs total reform, said Ian Birrell in The i Paper. Owing in part to a "tough on crime" narrative driven by the media, our incarceration rate is higher than any other country in Western Europe. Yet there is no firm evidence that longer sentences deter crimes – let alone in jails rife with drugs but short on opportunities for rehabilitation or treatment for addiction. Countries like Norway have shown that there are cheaper, more effective ways of tackling crime, but will the public accept them? It will take a bold politician to break this cycle.

Rogue AI: a step closer to doomsday?

Have we already lost control of AI, asked Danny Fortson in The Sunday Times. On 11 July, an entirely new kind of hacking attack was launched at Hugging Face, an online platform that houses a library of AI code and datasets. The attack, which clearly used AI agents, "advanced at frightening speed and scale", executing tens of thousands of actions so as to break into the company's system. Hugging Face managed to neutralise it, and alerted the authorities. Days later, the company behind the attack "raised its hand": OpenAI, the owner of ChatGPT, admitted that one of its tests had gone badly wrong. OpenAI had set up a "sandbox" – a supposedly safe area of its network, entirely disconnected from the internet – and ordered two cutting-edge AI models to perform a series of cybersecurity tests. The models decided to break out of the sandbox, escape onto the internet and hack into the place they knew they would find the answers: Hugging Face's servers.

OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman

Media outlets described the AI as "going rogue", said Jamie Bartlett in The Observer. But, in fact, these models merely single-mindedly performed the task they'd been given. The models reasoned that the most effective strategy was to cheat, and they did so with "considerable skill and persistence". This is nothing new. Leading models have deceived users, attempted blackmail, and even tried to copy themselves in order to complete their tasks. Some sceptical observers have suggested that this story might be a publicity stunt: that it benefits OpenAI to suggest that its products have stunning powers. But the truth is that these companies really don't know how to build AI systems safely – and yet they "continue to rush ahead building ever-more powerful models". It was fortunate that Hugging Face, a New York tech firm valued at $4.5bn, had a highly proficient cybersecurity team, said The Economist. "Things might have turned out much worse for a less well-resourced outfit."

This is not necessarily a doomsday scenario, said John Thickstun in The Guardian. AI is very good at hacking; but such powers can also be used to make IT systems more secure. Ironically, Hugging Face had to rely on a free Chinese AI model to thwart this attack – because OpenAI and US rivals jealously guard their own. At any rate, "the genie is out of the bottle", said Sean O'Grady in The Independent: we must learn how to manage AI. Every technology developed by mankind has been double-edged, and AI is no different. "A radically different world is not necessarily anything to be frightened of – but, even if it were, it's coming at us anyway."

Patriotic millionaires: calling for more taxes

Suggesting that Britain's tax burden is currently too low feels a bit like complaining that "the turnover of prime ministers is too slow", said Melissa Twigg in The Daily Telegraph. "In other words, wildly out of step with the national mood." And yet, no sooner had Andy Burnham taken office last week than 120 high-net-worth Britons, including Gary Lineker, Richard Curtis and Brian Eno, signed an open letter demanding higher taxes on the rich. The self-described "Patriotic Millionaires" want the Government to introduce a 2% tax on assets above £10m, and to bring capital gains tax in line with income tax – measures they claim could raise £36bn a year. "We want you to tax us," they wrote. "We are proud to pay and here to stay."

Lineker: "proud to pay"

The signatories should be commended – and Burnham should heed them, said the Daily Mirror. The total wealth of Britain's 157 billionaires is now equivalent to a fifth of GDP, having increased fivefold since 1990. Meanwhile, public services are creaking and people on low or middle incomes are having to "scrape to survive". Surely it is time to address this imbalance? Burnham could certainly use more money, said Matthew Lynn in The Spectator, but are Lineker et al. right when they say that they and other millionaires would gladly pay up – and not find ways to avoid the tax? It is very easy to pay more tax voluntarily if you want and yet, in the past five years, there have only been 62 instances of it. We don't know if Lineker has done so, but it seems unlikely, given that he recently fought a long, successful battle with HMRC over a tax bill of nearly £5m.

The real problem is not that these people are hypocrites, said Robert Colvile in The Sunday Times, but that when it comes to tax policy, they are "idiots". HMRC's own calculations say raising capital gains tax would lose money, as investors hold onto their assets or vanish abroad. As for a wealth tax, that would be complicated to levy, and would also send investors fleeing. In the 1970s, the last Labour chancellor named Healey – Denis – spent years trying to draft a wealth tax that would generate enough revenue to be worth the costs, before giving up. It would be even harder in this era of hypermobility.

Wit & Wisdom

"Never advise anyone to go to war or to marry."
Spanish proverb, quoted in the San Francisco Chronicle

"Democracy is a process by which the people are free to choose the man who will get the blame."
Laurence J. Peter, quoted on Medium

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."
Frederick Douglass, quoted in The Times

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."
Albert Einstein, ibid.

"He wanted to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral."
Alice Roosevelt on her father Theodore, quoted in The Washington Post

"I don't know why you're so angry with me, I'm not trying to help you."
Psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, quoted on The Dishcast

"One of the most reliable signs that you need a holiday is the conviction that you cannot spare the time to take one."
Bryan Magee, quoted on The Knowledge

"The genius of you Americans is that you never make clear-cut stupid moves, only complicated stupid moves."
Gamal Abdel Nasser, quoted in the Financial Times

"Attention is the beginning of devotion."
Mary Oliver, quoted in Sojourners

Statistic of the week

More than 70 attacks on mosques have been recorded in the past year, equivalent to one every five days. They include online abuse, hate speech, intimidation, acts of violence and vandalism.
The Guardian

Tour de France: the triumph of "the relentless Slovene"

The 2026 edition of the Tour de France took place "against the backdrop of heatwaves and wildfires", said Jeremy Whittle in The Guardian. But it wasn't just the "stifling temperatures" that "suffocated" the race. For throughout its entire three-week duration, it was dominated by a single cyclist: the "relentless Slovene" Tadej Pogacar, who claimed five of its 21 stages, broke records on "two of the most daunting climbs in cycling" – the Col du Tourmalet and Alpe d'Huez – and won the general classification by the formidable margin of six minutes and 26 seconds. In so doing, he became only the fifth cyclist in history – after Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Induráin – to win five Tours. Since Pogacar, 27, is also the youngest by two years to achieve the feat (next in the pecking order is Merckx, who won his fifth title aged 29 in 1974), there seems little doubt that Pogacar will go on to better his rivals. As Merckx, now 81, noted after the Slovene's latest victory: "I don't think he'll be content just to draw level with me and the other champions."

Pogacar: an all-time great

While the fight for the yellow jersey wasn't much of a contest, this Tour wasn't short of incident, said Lawrence Ostlere in The Independent. In Saturday's penultimate stage, tragedy was only narrowly averted when the American Sepp Kuss – who at the time was leading the stage – "lost control at speed on a right-hand bend" and crashed into a low wall overlooking a ravine. Only the netting that organisers had placed above the wall – which ran out less than a metre later – prevented him from plunging over. The next day, the Tour ended "with a sprint that may have been the greatest seen on the final day in Paris", said David Walsh in The Times. Although Pogacar "didn't need to win again", he nonetheless forged ahead of the peloton, along with Dutch rider Mathieu van der Poel, and led with a few hundred metres left to go. At this point, his "complete exhaustion" caught up with him, and he slowed "just as the peloton got to him"; van der Poel, by contrast, "accelerated one last time", and finished factionally in front. But Pogacar's performance nonetheless summed up why he is the champion he is: no matter what the situation, he "rides like a kid trying to win his first race".

That said, his "dominance comes at a cost", said Tom Cary in The Daily Telegraph. A rider who smashes so many records – including "beating times set by convicted dopers" – inevitably invites scrutiny. The news that midway through the Tour, Pogacar was tested one morning at 5am has only "added to the disquiet". If he is clean – and he has never failed a doping test – then such scepticism, of course, is deeply unfair. But unfortunately, it is "cycling's curse" that no winner is ever free of suspicion.

Formula 1: Lando Norris finally has cause to celebrate

In stark contrast to his title-winning 2025, this has been a "testing" season for Britain's Lando Norris, said Giles Richards in The Guardian. Without a win since last November, the 26-year-old went into the Hungarian Grand Prix languishing in fifth place in the drivers' standings. But by the time the race had ended, he "finally had reason to celebrate".

Norris: "a slice of luck"

Norris started in pole position, thanks to a "brilliant lap" in qualifying, said Molly Hudson in The Times. But all his good work appeared to be "undone when he ran wide at turn two onto the dirty side of the track", which allowed his McLaren teammate, Oscar Piastri, to "snatch the lead". For half the race, the Australian stayed in front, but then Norris was handed a huge slice of luck: Carlos Sainz Jr "crashed into" Piastri while being lapped. That enabled Norris to retake the lead, and he ended up 15 seconds ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen, with 19-year-old Kimi Antonelli in third place. Norris's racing skills haven't deserted him this season, said Luke Slater in The Daily Telegraph: he has been held back by an "uncompetitive" and "unreliable" car. But now it's been given a much-needed upgrade, he finally has the "tools to showcase his talents". Even so, he is unlikely to challenge for the title: he trails Antonelli – the leader – by 91 points.

And despite finishing third, it's the Italian teenager who benefitted most from this race, extending his lead over second-placed Lewis Hamilton, said Jonathan McEvoy in the Daily Mail. Hamilton had a deeply frustrating weekend. First, he was demoted three places on the grid, for "inadvertently blocking Piastri in qualifying"; then he received a five-second penalty, for exceeding the speed limit in the pits. These penalties condemned him to fifth position. He is now 50 points behind Antonelli.

English cricket's leadership crisis

This was meant to be the summer when England's Test team "reset", said Simon Wilde in The Sunday Times. Instead, with a series against Pakistan looming, the team finds itself lacking both a full-time coach and captain. As yet, the ECB has failed to find a replacement for Brendon McCullum, who was sacked as red-ball coach after the series defeat by New Zealand – while being kept on in the white-ball role. Nor is there an obvious candidate to replace Ben Stokes, who resigned as captain in June. The upshot is a total shambles, said Nick Hoult in The Daily Telegraph. "It is hard to remember England facing such a leadership vacuum since the late 1980s, when the captaincy was passed around on almost a weekly basis."

Root: England's next captain?

The hunt for a coach is undoubtedly "being complicated" by the need for any new appointee to work alongside McCullum, "rather than taking full control of both red- and white-ball squads", said Simon Burnton and Matt Hughes in The Guardian. And potential candidates will be wary of "such a set-up".

As for the captaincy, it would seem that Joe Root – who led the team, not very successfully, in the five years before Stokes took over – has "emerged as the favourite", said Will Macpherson in The Daily Telegraph. He is no one's ideal candidate, but with Harry Brook (Stokes's preferred replacement) seemingly thriving as white-ball captain, there is simply no clear alternative.

Sporting headlines

Gaelic football Mayo beat Kerry to become All-Ireland champions for the first time in 75 years – breaking a reputed "curse" condemning them to endless defeat.

Commonwealth Games Adam Ramsay-Peaty, England's most-decorated swimmer, won bronze medals in both the 100m breaststroke and 50m breaststroke.

Football Liverpool are reportedly considering breaking the British transfer record by signing Paris Saint-Germain winger Bradley Barcola for £145m. John Stones is slated to move from Man City to Inter Milan.

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TERMS AND CONDITIONS: 1. The closing date is 1 September 2026. 2. Open to UK residents only and only one entry per person. 3. Entrants under 18 require parent/guardian permission. 4. One winner will receive: a £100 Amazon voucher, and be invited to nominate a UK primary school to receive 250 children's magazines (worth approximately £1,500) and £1,000 cash donation to the school library, and 19 runners-up will receive: a £100 Amazon voucher and be invited to nominate a UK primary school to receive 250 children's magazines. 5. The magazines will all be suitable for children aged between 5 and 12 years old, and could include the following titles: Bluey, Girl Talk, LEGO® NINJAGO®, Match of the Day, MEGA!, Numberblocks, The Week Junior, The Week Junior Science+Nature and more. Each school nominated by a winner will receive a variety of current titles and the exact number of copies of each title may vary. 6. The magazines will be sent to the nominated schools in the week commencing 12th October 2026, to celebrate National Magazine Day on 14th October 2026. 7. For full terms and conditions, see online entry form.

Pick of the week's correspondence

The Burnham bounce?

To The Guardian

After a decade and more of miserableness, bleakness and being told I have to face hard truths, what I want from Andy Burnham is simple. I want to wake up tomorrow with a sense of optimism and a spring in my step, knowing that things are finally going to get better.

Mike Storey, Peterborough

A convenient solution

To The Times

The nation faces a dramatic shortage of water and the response is feeble and fragmented. There is one measure which could have a far more dramatic effect than all those currently proposed. Each of us expels, several times a day, less than half a litre of a harmless fluid, and then proceeds to use 20 times as much pure drinking water to flush the WC. It is a convention which is illogical and, at a time of shortage, counterintuitive.

The Government should create a short-term "drought regime" under which the population should be enjoined to flush WCs after urination just a few times daily. This is a practical way to reduce consumption by millions of litres a day and with no downside in terms of hygiene or damage to agriculture.

Tony Jones, ret'd director of Albion Water, London

How Venetians voted

To the Daily Mail

Concern about the fairness of voting systems is not new. Almost a thousand years ago, the Venetians were concerned about the possibility of electoral fraud and nepotism, so they devised a complex method of election.

In the Doge's Palace, members of the Great Council drew either a silver or a gold disc from an urn. The 30 who drew gold were then reduced to nine by a further lottery. The nine then elected a further 40, who each needed at least seven votes each, then 12 of them were chosen by lottery. The 12 then elected another 25, who needed at least nine votes each and chose nine from among themselves. These nine elected another 45, reduced to 11 by lottery. The 11 elected 41 councillors whose task would be to elect the next Doge. From these 41, the one with the most preferences above a minimum of 25 would become Doge.

Perhaps we should stick to first-past-the-post.

C.D. Field, Middlesbrough

Sir Humphrey's schedule

To The Times

It was worrying to read in Rishi Sunak's advice to Andy Burnham that, on entering No. 10, "you are presented with an hour-by-hour diary for the day and your schedule for the next three weeks". If Burnham accepts the schedule, it will demonstrate that he has already conceded too much control to the civil service.

He must receive security briefings and attend some ceremonial engagements. But the PM should be the prime decision-maker. He should determine who he will see, when and for how long. Otherwise, the Sir Humphreys really are in charge.

Steve Ellis, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria

Exchange of the week

Manchesterism vs. Thatcherism

To The Sunday Times

Robert Colvile is right that Andy Burnham lives in a parallel universe stuck in the 1970s ("If Burnham understood Thatcherism, he wouldn't be so keen to reverse it all"). He does, however, need to be clearer in his prescriptions. It was indeed right to privatise many industries, including water. It is also important to have the right shareholders and a regulator that regulates the right things.

Regulating profit is only part of the equation: the debt load that was imposed to pay large dividends was the real problem and it was not addressed. He should also be clearer that modern manufacturing is not the job-creation panacea that Burnham imagines. It requires cheaper energy and a lot of patient capital, and creates only a few highly skilled jobs.

Burnham's prescription is built on ignorance and ideology. It will fail.

Sir John Rose, former CEO of Rolls-Royce, London

To The Sunday Times

I strongly disagree with Robert Colvile: it is precisely those who understand Thatcherism and its long-term consequences who are rightly keen to replace it. The privatisation of water and railways has been disastrous because the first duty of such companies is to their shareholders, not their customers. Tax cuts and huge salaries for business tycoons have not yielded a promised "trickle down" of wealth, but instead led to a massive increase in inequality, and reliance on top-up welfare benefits and food banks due to poverty wages.

I find the continued dogmatic defence of Thatcherism rather like the deluded defence of communism by the former rulers of the Soviet Union: our ideology and ideas are marvellous; they just haven't been applied properly, or been given enough time to prove their brilliance.

Pete Dorey, Bath

Penal populism's paradox

To The Daily Telegraph

Early release of prisoners is the predictable consequence of politicians caving in to penal populism's demands for ever-longer sentences. Sentence inflation of 45% over the past 15 years has clogged up our prisons. Ironically, the "lock 'em up and throw away the key" mentality has led to earlier release of heinous criminals.

In *The Honest Politician's Guide to Prisons and Probation*, criminologists Lucy Willmott and Roy King list former justice secretaries from all political parties who regret playing to the gallery as tough law-and-order figures. The turning point in sentencing policy came in 1993, after James Bulger was murdered by two children. Instead of acknowledging the need to address desperately poor parenting, and manage expectations about what a criminal justice system can do, senior politicians kicked off the arms race of toughness on crime.

We need a proper reset, not another handbrake turn in response to penal populism.

Lord Farmer (Con.), London

Gaslit by British Gas

To The Guardian

According to Centrica's boss, Chris O'Shea, most people using British Gas prefer to talk to a chatbot. He says that 90% of his customers prefer to use digital channels than speak to a person in the first instance, and that the number of customer calls has fallen by 20%. Well, this is hardly surprising, given the difficulty of getting through to a real person.

We are being gaslit by large companies, including banks, that have gradually withdrawn face-to-face access to customer service. This is not about improving the quality of service, it is simply naked cost reduction. Customer preference has nothing to do with it.

Charles MacKinnon, Glasgow

Feeling the heat

To The Guardian

I was interested to read some of the words that your letter writers associated with the weather and our reactions to it.

The English language is redolent with words to do with harsh weather, with many of the longest-established terms tending towards the cold or inclement. Perhaps as hotter weather becomes the norm rather than the exception, we'll start to talk less about dreich days that leave us shrammed and more about blazers that are a bit of a pech and leave us feeling mooth.

The *Historical Thesaurus of the OED* has words to describe all weathers, including all of the above and many more.

Fiona McPherson, executive editor, OED

"I just want the neighbours to think we have air con."

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● Letters have been edited

THE NEXT GLOBAL CONFLICT STARTS BENEATH THE ICE...

From beneath the Arctic ice, a diabolical new weapon emerges...
BALLISTIC
THE NEW LUKE CARLTON THRILLER
FRANK GARDNER
THE EXPLOSIVE NEW NOVEL FROM THE No.1 BESTSELLER

'A must-read for fans of the intelligent thriller'
EXPRESS

'Combines authentic tradecraft, geopolitical insight and page-turning suspense'
CHARLES CUMMING
Sunday Times bestselling author

OUT NOW

TOMORROW'S HEADLINES. TODAY'S THRILLER.

Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

The People's Emperor

by Edward Shawcross

Faber 528pp £25

The Week Bookshop **£22.99 (incl. p&p)**

According to Karl Marx, Napoleon III embodied the truth that history repeats itself "first as tragedy, then as farce". And today, that just about sums up the reputation of Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew, who rose to become France's president in 1848 and its emperor between 1852 and 1870. But in this "rollicking biography", Edward Shawcross "asks us to take a second look", said Pratinav Anil in The Times. "His aim is not so much to canonise Louis-Napoléon, as he was widely known – although he occasionally edges in that hagiographic direction – as to restore him to the front ranks of 19th century statesmen." Accordingly, he shows that the man Victor Hugo derisively dubbed "Napoléon le Petit" actually did much that was good, including restoring French prestige in the Crimean War and creating the "broad boulevards" of modern Paris. Had he died before the "fiasco of the Franco-Prussian War", Shawcross argues, he would be remembered as the "architect of modern France". His superbly readable biography "has the momentum of a Victorian *Bildungsroman* crossed with a political thriller".

As the son of Napoleon's brother Louis and stepdaughter Hortense (the first daughter of Empress Joséphine), Louis-Napoléon was raised on tales of "Napoleonic glory", said Simon Sebag Montefiore in The Daily Telegraph. Early in his career, he staged various "bungled" coups, one of which led to his being "locked up in the Fortress of Ham" in the Somme. There he charmed everyone and had a baby with the maid. ("Wild sex" – with maids, actresses, aristocrats and courtesans – is a theme.) In 1846, he moved to London, before returning to France to run for president after the revolution of 1848. He ran a "brilliant campaign", and won 74.2% of the vote. Four years later, he was proclaimed "Emperor of the French" following a heavily manipulated plebiscite.

Shawcross points to parallels between Louis-Napoléon and Donald Trump, said Oliver Farry in The Irish Times. He was an authoritarian populist who promised, as it were, to "Make France Great Again". But he was "far more liberal" than Trump – as his "enlightened attitude towards Algeria's Arabs" shows. The second empire floundered due to his "severe miscalculations" – ultimately, being goaded into war by Bismarck, defeated and dethroned. While "freely acknowledging the emperor's weakness", Shawcross presents him as "something of a doomed visionary", said Jonathan Keates in Literary Review. With an "impressive command of its sources", this is a "masterly" book.

A Sudden Flicker of Light

by David Thomson

Allen Lane 368pp £25

The Week Bookshop **£22.99 (incl. p&p)**

For more than 50 years, David Thomson has been "watching and writing about movies and hanging out with movie people", said Ed Potton in The Times. The author of more than 40 books, including the highly influential *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* (1975), he is "unique in his field", being "intellectual, opinionated, informed and funny". Now, at the age of 85, Thomson has written a book "billed as the capstone of his career". A history of the movies, "from the Lumière brothers to the Coen brothers", from *Psycho* to *Pretty Woman* to Jean-Luc Godard, it also covers much else besides: "we get detours to John Keats, Gustav Mahler, Werner Heisenberg and Tracey Emin, none of which feels dilettantish". Thomson also celebrates the "written word", and suggests that novels are in many ways superior to films. Written in a style that "veers between conspiratorial and donnish", this book has the "learning of an encyclopaedia, the wisdom of a novel and the zingers of a screwball comedy".

While he remains as obsessed by film as ever, Thomson is increasingly fearful that "movies may be bad for us", said Mark Glancy in Literary Review. There is, of course, nothing new about claims that they shorten attention spans and flatten our sense of evil. But Thomson suggests such anxieties have been "given new weight and immediacy by the rise of Donald Trump, with his constant demand for our attention and his indifference to morality". It's an argument which seems, alas, a bit of a "rabbit hole". Fortunately, such "wintry and sombre ponderings" don't take up too much space, said Peter Bradshaw in The Guardian. For the most part, this book is a "straightforwardly rapturous, rhapsodic celebration of the extraordinary adventure of cinema", written by an author who, despite his advanced age, is as "eccentric, exasperating and absorbing as ever".

Novel of the week

Cool Machine

by Colson Whitehead

Fleet 368pp £22

The Week Bookshop **£19.99**

This "old-school crime caper, set in 1980s New York", is the final novel in Colson Whitehead's Harlem trilogy, following *Harlem Shuffle* and *Crook Manifesto*, said Lindsay Johns in The Spectator. And it's "another tour de force". Once again, it follows the "uptown peregrinations" of the trilogy's "endearing protagonist Ray Carney", a furniture salesman with a lucrative sideline as an underworld fence. Whereas the two previous parts were set in the 1960s and 1970s, this one "pitches us into the dirty, regenerative 1980s", said Xan Brooks in The Guardian. "That means hip hop on the stereo, graffiti on the subway cars and a widening gulf between rich and poor." It's a scene Whitehead knows well from his youth, which "only adds to the air of vivid, freewheeling fun".

Compared with the trilogy's first two novels, *Cool Machine* is a disappointment, said Josh Abbey in Literary Review. The plot seems secondary to its themes – race, identity, gentrification – and the writing too often "strives for significance". At his best, Whitehead is superb; here, he is "going through the motions".

THE WEEK Bookshop

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Opening times: Monday to Saturday 9am-5.30pm and Sunday 10am-4pm

Drama & Podcasts

Theatre: The Cherry Orchard

Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon (01789-331111). Until 29 August Running time: 2hrs 35mins ★★★

Hunt and Branagh in a "star-studded" production

"You wait 30 years for a Royal Shakespeare Company appearance from Kenneth Branagh and then two turn up at once," said Claire Allfree in The Daily Telegraph. Having starred as Prospero in *The Tempest* earlier this summer, Branagh is back with an "energetic, charismatic, touching performance" as Lopakhin – the son of a serf who has become a successful businessman – in a new version of *The Cherry Orchard*, adapted by Laura Wade. It's a "star-studded" production: the cast includes the American film stars Helen Hunt and Bill Pullman. And it looks "beguiling", said Clive Davis in The Times, with an "elegant set design" that "evokes an outpost of privilege facing extinction". Unfortunately, the evening veers too wildly between "broad comedy and pathos", while never quite finding a settled tone – or getting to the heart of the play.

In his final masterpiece – about the owners of a great Russian estate facing up to their financial ruin – Chekhov uses the metaphor of a doomed cherry orchard to "conjure a society on the cusp of seismic change, and a family splintered by inaction and marooned by personal grief", said Sarah Hemming in the FT. The orchard's significance is conveyed through pretty prints of cherry blossom that contrast with the gnarled branches that clamber up the set; and the performances are heightened, "as if many of the characters are acting in their own personal drama", aware that disaster is looming, yet unable or unwilling to meet the "demands of the moment". The production is full of insight, and painfully truthful moments, but it fails to mine the play's "heartbreaking depth", and its impact is dulled by a "curious lack of urgency".

Branagh's Lopakhin is unusually amenable, said Arifa Akbar in The Guardian. When his class rage erupts, it is "arresting" – but then it melts away. Hunt is surprisingly "featureless" as the landowner Ranyevskaya; Pullman brings "charm and comic charisma" to the part of her brother, but it's not enough to rescue a tonally soft-edged production that lacks a "magnetic centre to hold you".

The week's other opening

Trainspotting: The Musical

Theatre Royal Haymarket, London SW1 (020-7930 8800), until 5 September and then touring from 19 October to 20 March 2027

This misconceived "muddle" of a show proves that heroin addiction and musical theatre are not natural bedfellows. Choose life. Choose a job. Choose something else (Daily Telegraph).

Podcasts... Tocqueville, The Smiths and more

"A warm nostalgia trip for fans" of The Smiths

When the French diplomat Alexis de Tocqueville arrived in New York in 1831, he found "a city a quarter of the size of Paris, perched on the lower tip of Manhattan", that was "roamed by pigs", said Daisy Dunn in The Spectator. It was the official starting point for a nine-month road trip across the young nation, during which he visited 17 of the 24 established states and made the notes that would form the basis of *Democracy in America*, one of the great foundational works of political science. "The American inhabits a land where everything is constantly moving, and each movement seems to be progress," he observed. Almost two centuries on, The Economist's former US editor, John Prideaux, has retraced Tocqueville's journey for a "scintillating" six-part podcast about US democracy and society. Including interviews with everyone from wealthy philanthropists to the inmates of Sing Sing prison, **Tocqueville Road Trip** is "quite the journey, and Prideaux is a first-class guide".

I will never forget the "electric jolt" of seeing The Smiths perform *This Charming Man* on their debut appearance on *Top of the Pops* in late 1983, said Patricia Nicol in The Sunday Times. Fans "fell in love instantaneously" with a look and sound that were "subversively different" from the prevailing pop fare. Over the course of four intense years, the Manchester four-piece recorded 73 songs and four studio albums and had 20 consecutive Top 40 hits. **The Rise and Fall of The Smiths**, presented by Steve Lamacq and Elizabeth Alker, tells their story, mainly via archive BBC interviews, over eight snappy episodes (each of which ends with the laconic caveat that "Morrissey disputes some of the recollections featured"). It's a "warm nostalgia trip for fans and an informative survey for newcomers. I wish there was more." It's also a taster for Radio 6 Music's Indie Forever, a new digital station that's a "cooler relative of Radio 4 Extra and Radio 3 Unwind", aimed at listeners who find Radio 6 too focused on the youth market.

Two highly listenable new double-act podcasts have recently launched, said The Guardian. **Outsiding** is a new series hosted by journalist and author Caitlin Moran and the garden designer and *Gardeners' World* presenter Adam Frost. Each week, the pair talk about the outdoors and gardening, with well-known guests (Bob Mortimer, Dawn O'Porter) who join them in Moran's back garden in north London. Actor mates Helen George and Yvette Robinson have been bonding over their shared secret hobby – tarot cards, crystals, astrology and mysticism – for 20 years. In **Mystic Mates**, they "ask the big questions and share experiences – while having chummy fun".

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Stars reflect the overall quality of reviews and our own independent assessment (5 stars=don't miss; 1 star=don't bother)

On the Sea

1hr 51mins (15)

Thoughtful drama about forbidden love in a village in north Wales

★★★★

Written and directed by Warrington-born Helen Walsh, *On the Sea* is a "yearningly tender" drama about sex and love set in a small fishing community in north Wales, said David Sexton in The New Statesman. Jack (Barry Ward) is a careworn middle-aged man who has spent his whole life here, working for the family mussel-farming business, and the film opens with a "lovely, rhythmic sequence" – showing the work of gathering and cleaning mussels – which "masterfully" establishes the world he inhabits. Jack is married to his teenage sweetheart Maggie (Liz White), with whom he has a wayward son, and has never acknowledged that he is gay. Then he meets Daniel (Lorne MacFadyen), "a hunky young itinerant deckhand" who "has no such qualms about his sexuality". Soon, they are going out fishing together, and on the sea, they gradually "find a world of their own".

Shades of *God's Own Country* and *Brokeback Mountain* "hover above this thoughtful" tale of forbidden love in a tough community, said Kevin Maher in The Times. You might wonder how long we can keep producing dramas that depend for their tension on a level of "foam-flecked homophobia" more redolent of 1960s Wyoming than the UK in 2026. Still, "gay panic" persists in this village, and *On the Sea* amounts to a carefully observed study of "masculinity under pressure", as Jack must try to "juggle his multiple fragile identities". There are some pacing issues, said Alex Davidson in Sight and Sound: too much time is devoted to Jack's relationships with secondary characters. But the connection between the two men is "sensitively portrayed", the performances are strong, and the film makes excellent use of its Anglesey locations.

Ask E. Jean

1hr 31mins (15)

Powerful documentary about the woman who stood up to Trump

★★★★

"E. Jean Carroll has had quite a life," said Alissa Wilkinson in The New York Times. She made her name as a gonzo journalist, writing first-person features for Esquire and Playboy, before becoming an advice columnist at Elle magazine: her long-running Ask E. Jean column became so popular that it was turned into a chat show. Then, in 2019, she made international news headlines when she accused President Trump of having raped her in a department store changing room in the mid-1990s. Trump branded her a liar, insisting she was not his "type". Carroll sued him for sexual abuse and defamation, leading to two civil court trials, which she won. Trump recently paid her $5.6m in damages over one; he has yet to pay a penny for the other. In this documentary, Carroll guides viewers through her career, her decision to break her silence about Trump's abuse, and the "harrowing experience of going up against one of the most powerful men in the world – twice".

This is a "solid, unshowy" film, said Wendy Ide in The Observer, which contains some extremely powerful moments, including a present-day conversation in which Carroll talks to her best friend about how she felt immediately after the attack, and her decision not to report it. Yet we learn that, back in the 1990s, she advised abused women to "always press charges" – which creates a "jarring dissonance". Still, the documentary is sympathetic to its subject, who comes across as unexpectedly "magnetic" – "curious, mischievous and candid", said Angie Han in The Hollywood Reporter. In the public imagination, Carroll, now 82, has been defined by someone else's crime; the film paints a broad portrait of "a figure far more interesting than the bad thing that happened to her".

The Dink

1hr 43mins (12)

Daft comedy set in the world of pickleball

★★

"It's a good rule of thumb that the dumber the sport – the more ludicrously, flamboyantly niche – the better the film," said Tom Shone in The Sunday Times. Think *Dodgeball*, *Kingpin*, *Blades of Glory*, *Happy Gilmore* and *The Wrestler* – all great films about "absurd sports with arcane rules". So *The Dink*, which is about pickleball, a simplified version of tennis played with a perforated plastic ball, should be "the *Citizen Kane*" of the genre. Sadly it is not that, but it is amiable enough. Jake Johnson plays Dusty "The Hammer" Boyd. A former tennis pro who once "almost beat Andy Roddick", he is now reduced, after an injury, to coaching nine-year-olds. His father (Ed Harris) is desperate to keep pickleball out of their family-owned tennis club. But at an "open pickleball mixer", Dusty meets an older devotee (Mary Steenburgen), and is won over by the charms of "slowed-down tennis played by pensioners" with enormous ping-pong paddles.

The script leans towards the "frat-pack" humour familiar from the era of Ben Stiller, Owen Wilson et al., said Beth Webb in Empire, and if that is your thing, there is much to enjoy in this "popcorn movie": "foul-mouthed pensioners" and decent action, plus cameos from Andy Roddick, John McEnroe and Stiller himself. The gags, however, "feel recycled". Johnson is a likeable presence, said Martin Robinson in The London Standard, but he doesn't have the comic edge of a Bill Murray or Adam Sandler to "make the film fly". Ultimately, it lacks the "anarchic energy" of a great sports comedy. It should be "taking a wrecking ball" to pickleball – instead, it is "disappointingly gentle".

Into Ukraine's Kill Zone: Boris Johnson reports from the front line

There aren't many places in the world where Boris Johnson can still expect a hero's welcome, said Sarah Carson in The i Paper. Ukraine is one of them, however, thanks to his vocal support for the country since the Russian invasion. In *Into Ukraine's Kill Zone* (Channel 5), Johnson returns to the country, with some Daily Mail war reporters, and – accompanied by Ukrainian soldiers – he makes a perilous journey to the country's front line. There are some irritating concessions to his normal "scruffy-haired charade" – of course he wears his helmet lopsided – but he is here as a journalist, and the film offers some straightforward reportage.

Johnson: "unwelcome bathos"

I'll start with the positives, said Charlotte Ivers in The Sunday Times. Johnson didn't have to make this documentary: he clearly cares about the people of Ukraine. And by virtue of who he is, he gets excellent access, and we get up close to "the soul-deadening, sometimes mundane reality of war". The problem is that Johnson is an "innately comic creature". We see him eating a hot dog through a balaclava; and asking if he can go to the pub. "You shot the arse off that one!" he tells a soldier, who has shot down a Russian drone. The result is "jarring, unwelcome bathos".

The documentary is a "multifaceted oddity", said Barbara Ellen in The Observer. It is the latest round in the "Johnson versus Putin grudge match", and a "study of a man mourning" his loss of power on the global stage. It is also a valuable reminder of the suffering of the Ukrainian people. Ultimately, though, it contains too much Boris.

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Exhibition of the week **Richard Dadd: Beyond Bedlam**

Royal Academy, London W1 (020-7300 8090, royalacademy.org.uk). Until 25 October

The life of the artist Richard Dadd "makes for quite a story", said Mark Hudson in The Independent. Dadd (1817-86) was a talented painter who began to display signs of schizophrenia during a tour of the Near East. Then in 1843, he murdered his father during a "psychotic episode", believing him to be a devil. He spent the rest of his life incarcerated in Bethlem Hospital (Bedlam) and Broadmoor, where he continued to paint; the bustling fairy scenes he created are some of the "most haunting" images in the history of British art. He was almost forgotten until the 1960s, when his exquisitely precise, visionary works became popular in the hippy era. Dadd has remained a cult figure ever since, but in an era of greater mental health awareness, it feels timely that the Royal Academy (where he trained as a young man) is revisiting his art with unprecedented sensitivity. The first major exhibition devoted to this archetypal "outsider" in more than 50 years, it surveys his entire career and poses the question: how did mental illness affect Dadd's paintings?

Detail from The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke (1855-64): "masterpiece"

The show encourages us to see Dadd as more than a "mad" artist, said Jonathan Jones in The Guardian. And it's true that he was already "remarkable" before his incarceration. Fairies – a common subject in the Victorian era – were his "hit theme": not "Disneyfied fairies", but the "sinister and destructive" beings seen in Shakespeare. His Puck, for instance, is "personified as a giant baby irradiated by lunar light", perched on a toadstool. Dadd's paintings from Bedlam, however, are "brutally different". His "masterpiece", *The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke*, painted over nine years from 1855, represents a total break with existing pictorial convention: between tall, magnified strands of grass and vegetation you can make out "a detailed portrayal of fairy society". The "tiny folk" are not beautiful, but often malformed – as if he were showing us "natural-history specimens observed through a microscope". In the end, "you can't get away from it. Dadd was an interesting artist before Bedlam but became a great one in it."

Dadd wasn't a true outsider artist, said Alastair Sooke in The Daily Telegraph. He was "trained as well as talented", as the "dull", conventional opening room shows. Even in the asylum, he remained "in sync with mainstream Victorian art": there are costumes, Orientalist themes, pre-Raphaelite touches. Yet the "originality of his vision" is never in doubt – Dadd's art was singular, hallucinatory, and enlivened by an "ironic wit". Even his conventional travel scenes have strange, surrealist-like touches: *The Artist's Halt in the Desert* (c.1845) shows the Moon skewered by a lance, "like a marshmallow on a stick". Dadd gave form to "those shadowy, sometimes bedevilling thoughts that dwell in the hinterland of consciousness" – and this is a weird but "compelling" exhibition.

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Richard Pettibone

at Timothy Taylor

It's reasonable to say that the American painter Richard Pettibone (1938-2024) took pop art to its logical extreme. He was a decade younger than the movement's leading lights, and his best-known work acknowledges this. They were already appropriating existing images: Andy Warhol was painting ambiguous homages to mass-produced consumer goods, while Roy Lichtenstein had grabbed commercial illustration as his subject. Pettibone thought: what was to stop him appropriating theirs? His response was a series of studious copies of his elders' playful, already "iconic" representations of modern ephemera, scaled-down significantly, often to the size of postcards. This show features a selection of the "paintings of paintings" Pettibone produced between 1967 and 2021. There are small likenesses of Warhol's soup cans, of Lichtenstein's comic-strip pictures; of totemic works by Ed Ruscha and Frank Stella. Some will condemn it as trashy and unoriginal; others will embrace those very qualities. Prices on request.

Lichtenstein Modern Painting... (1967)

15 Bolton Street, London W1 (020-7409 3344). Until 21 August

Tate's new director

Jessica Morgan has been confirmed as the new "director of Tate". Morgan, 57, was "the clear frontrunner" to replace Maria Balshaw, who left this spring after nine years in charge, said Lanre Bakare in The Guardian. Morgan (pictured) worked at Tate as a curator for more than a decade before leaving to lead the Dia Art Foundation in New York, which holds a major collection of work by artists of the 1960s and 1970s. Tate's chair, Roland Rudd, said she took a "very big pay cut" to return; Balshaw earned around £220,000. Morgan brings "dynamism and a fresh eye", said Jackie Wullschläger in the FT, at a time when, according to staff on strike in December, Tate is in "a clear existential crisis". She inherits an institution "dogged by financial deficit, recent heavy redundancies" and low salaries – a curator position advertised last month offers a salary of £32,675. Since the pandemic, it has struggled to mount blockbuster exhibitions.

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The week's guide to what's worth seeing

Book now for Edinburgh

Director Ivo van Hove has reworked Tony Kushner's era-defining **Angels in America** – about the Aids epidemic – for a new production (with surtitles) by Internationaal Theatre Amsterdam, with a David Bowie soundtrack. 15-20 August, King's Theatre (eif.co.uk).

In the roster of standup acts at the **Fringe**, one is already standing out as the "most controversial": *Amanda Knox: Cartwheel* sees the 39-year-old American – wrongfully convicted of murder in Italy in 2009 – ponder how to move on with her life (7-17 August, Gilded Balloon Teviot; Daily Telegraph). In *Ahir Shah: Golden*, "the erudite Londoner" muses on love, money, family and frogs (6-30 August, Pleasance Courtyard; Guardian). *Elf Lyons is The Woman on the Edge* "promises something unusually personal" from the comedian (5-31 August, Pleasance Courtyard; Guardian); edfringe.com.

Stockard Channing directs Samuel Beckett's one-man classic **Krapp's Last Tape**, with David Westhead in the title role. 5-31 August, Upstairs at Assembly Roxy (edfringe.com).

A former metalworks stands in for a music venue in Manchester in Grid Iron's site-specific adaptation of **Mayflies**, Andrew O'Hagan's poignant coming-of-age novel set in the 1980s. 7-30 August, Brown's of Leith (edfringe.com).

One of the festival's musical highlights will be a residency by the **Jazz at Lincoln Centre Orchestra** – see them in a specially commissioned performance with virtuoso pianist Yuja Wang; 12 August, Usher Hall (eif.co.uk).

David Westhead in Krapp's Last Tape

San Francisco Ballet takes on the topic of our times in **Mere Mortals**, an immersive retelling of the Pandora's box myth through the lens of AI. Expect slick visuals and an original score by electronic composer Floating Points, performed with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. 28-30 August, Edinburgh Playhouse (eif.co.uk).

Just out in paperback

A Truce That Is Not Peace by Miriam Toews (Fourth Estate £10.99). The bestselling Canadian novelist's searingly intimate memoir is a "meditation on writing, suicide, guilt and silence", and it's a "triumph" (Blake Morrison in The Guardian).

Best books... Julia Samuel

The psychotherapist and author of Grief Works *(Penguin £10.99) picks books that changed how she understands dying and grief. She will be speaking at the inaugural Big Brue festival of ideas in Bruton, Somerset, 19-20 September (bigbrue.com)*

Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy by J. William Worden, 1982 (Routledge £41.99). This is a book for therapists, but valuable to anyone. Worden's four tasks of mourning helped us move away from the rigid idea that grief follows fixed stages. We cannot control the loss, but we can engage with the work of adapting to it. That idea offers agency when life feels helpless.

With the End in Mind by Kathryn Mannix, 2017 (William Collins £9.99). Drawing on decades in palliative medicine, Mannix tells stories of ordinary people as they approach death. She writes with such compassion and clarity that the frightening becomes more knowable. It's a book that helps us prepare for the deaths of those we love and have the conversations we often avoid.

The Grieving Brain by Mary-Frances O'Connor, 2022 (HarperOne £12.99). A neuroscientist, O'Connor explains that grief is a form of learning. After someone dies, the brain must slowly update its understanding of the world. She helps explain the yearning, confusion and repetition of grief, while offering the deeply reassuring knowledge that adaptation takes time.

Continuing Bonds edited by Dennis Klass, Phyllis R. Silverman and Steven L. Nickman, 1996 (Routledge £54.99). This collection challenges the old belief that we should detach from the person who died – forget and move on. Instead, it shows that the relationship carries on, in a changed form. Death ends a life, but the love never dies.

The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion, 2005 (Fourth Estate £9.99). Didion's account of her husband's sudden death captures the strange logic of grief with great precision. She shows how the mind knows someone has died while another part still expects them to return. It is fiercely personal, yet almost every bereaved reader will recognise something of themselves within it.

Titles in print are available from The Week Bookshop (theweekbookshop.co.uk). For out-of-print books visit biblio.co.uk

Television

Programmes

Hitler's Games: Berlin 1936 in Colour Documentary that uses restored colourised archive footage to explore how Hitler turned the 1936 Olympics into a Nazi propaganda event. Sat 1 Aug, C4 20:00 (60mins).

Richard E. Grant's Very Modern Odyssey The actor embarks on his own voyage around the Mediterranean, visiting locations believed to have inspired Homer's epic. First stop, Malta. Sun 2 Aug, C4 20:00 (60mins).

Van Der Valk Fourth season of the Dutch detective drama. When one of two whistle-blowers is murdered, Van Der Valk must ensure that the second makes it to court. Sun 2 Aug, ITV1 20:00 (120mins).

The Victorians with Rob Rinder and Ruth Goodman The presenters explore how both the rich and poor experienced the Victorian era, starting in the 1840s with the advent of steam railways. Tue 4 Aug, C5 21:00 (90mins).

Films

On the Waterfront (1954) Marlon Brando stars as the boxer turned longshoreman in Elia Kazan's Oscar-winning drama about crime and corruption. Sat 1 Aug, BBC2 10:05 (105mins).

Sing Sing (2023) After being jailed for a crime he didn't commit, "Divine G" (Colman Domingo) finds purpose in a theatre group with other inmates. Mon 3 Aug, BBC2 23:05 (100mins).

Captain Phillips (2013) Tense, fact-based drama starring Tom Hanks as the captain of a cargo ship that is hijacked by Somali pirates. Thu 6 Aug, Film4 21:00 (160mins).

New to streaming TV

Ride or Die Hannah Waddingham stars in an entertaining caper "that melds a contract killer thriller with a buddy comedy" (Daily Telegraph). On Prime Video.

Pompeii: Out of Time with Tom Hiddleston The actor presents an "unintentionally hilarious" three-part docu-drama about the Roman city (Independent). On Disney+.

Handsome Edwardian houses

▲ **Dorset:** Clare Mount, Broadstone. A delightful period house moments from Broadstone Golf Club and set in mature gardens. 6 beds, 4 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, 4 receps, conservatory, garden, garage. £1.35m; Hardwick Estate Agents (01202-094277).

▼ **Cornwall:** Portloe, Roseland Peninsula. Superb waterside residence with its own slipway and sea views. 4 beds, 3 baths, kitchen, 2 receps, balcony, sun room, garden, garage. £1.75m; Lillicrap Chilcott (01872-273473).

▶ **Berkshire:** Waterside House, Bray. Striking Tudor Revival/Edwardian house in a splendid riverside setting with mooring. 6 beds, 7 baths, kitchen, 5 receps, garden, parking. £3.975m; Savills (01753-834600).

◀ **Devon:** Haldonhay, Newton Ferrers. Dating from around 1903, this elegant period house is perched above the estuary, with views over the surrounding landscape. Master suite, 3 further beds, 2 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, conservatory, 3 receps, study, swimming pool, garden, garage. £1.5m; Marchand Petit (01752-873311).

◀ **Cumbria:** Ravenoaks, Watermillock. Magnificent Arts & Crafts/Edwardian property with panoramic views towards Lake Ullswater, Helvellyn and Arthur's Pike. Set in approx. 11 acres of unspoilt land in a peaceful corner of the Lake District National Park. 6 beds, 4 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, 3 receps, snug, garden, parking. £1.5m; Fine & Country (01228-583109).

▼ **Isle of Wight:** Rofford House, Yarmouth. A fine country house with views over the River Yar Estuary. Set within approx. 3 acres of mature gardens, just 300 yards down to the sea. 8 beds, 4 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, 4 receps, outbuildings, garden, parking, The 3-bed Lodge is available by separate negotiation. £2.2m; Spence Willard (01983-761005).

▼ **Scottish Borders:** Maplehurst, Galashiels. An outstanding B-listed Arts & Crafts/Edwardian home set within approx. 1.5 acres of mature landscaped gardens. 8 beds, 9 baths, kitchen, 6 receps, garden, garage. OIEO £895,000; Rettie (01896-824074).

◀ **London:** Arkwright Road, Hampstead NW3. A charming second-floor flat with bespoke built-in storage in an impressive Grade II red-brick house with grand communal areas. 1 bed with juliet balcony, family bath, kitchen, recep; potential parking. £615,000; Chestertons (020-7794 3311).

MoneyWeek talks

PODCAST

Kalpana Fitzpatrick

Andrew van Sickle

MoneyWeek editors sit down with some of the most influential voices in business, politics, and finance. Tune in for expert insights and top tips.

AVAILABLE ON ALL PLATFORMS

Oudh 1722 *66 Union Street, Borough, London SE1 (020-3179 1722)*
"Can I explain the menu?" has to be one of the most irritating questions, says Tom Parker Bowles in The Mail on Sunday. But "you'll need all the help you can get" at Oudh 1722, a new restaurant in London dedicated to the "cooking of Lucknow, that great north-Indian city". Those unfamiliar with it may find the menu baffling, but the food is "astonishing". The dishes are many and various, but united by their subtle spicing. *Bheja*, or gently scrambled lamb's brain, has a "soft, nuanced majesty". *Malai murgh* proves to be a "whole chicken leg, complete with claw, drowned in a magnificently creamy cardamom and saffron sauce". Goat curry has "astonishing depth". Vast split prawns are lavished in a "buttery, garlic-heavy sauce" and are topped with tiny chunks of raw mango. However, the "crowning glory" of our lunch has to be the *mutanjan dum biryani*: "a great mound of gloriously seasoned rice studded with sweet carrots, and topped with wobbling chunks of oxtail". I've rarely eaten Indian food as spectacular as this. "Come hungry, and take home a doggy bag." *About £75 a head.*

Vieni *41 Pitsford Street, Goodsyard, Birmingham (0121-806 0080)*
Angelina Adamo made her name creating "plates of marvellous arancini" while running the kitchen at The Circle Lounge inside Birmingham's Hippodrome, says Grace Dent in The Guardian. Now she has opened her first solo venture, a "small" and "scrappy" Sicilian restaurant in the city's Jewellery Quarter. A "weary" companion and I snuck in late one Saturday afternoon, planning just to have drinks and snacks. But having polished off a "round of 1946 *gildas* and a plate of marjoram polenta bites", we were "begging them to serve us dinner" too. Adamo's cooking leans towards the "hearty". Her pea, broad bean and pecorino arancini are not the "piddly quail's egg-sized" affairs so popular in Britain; this one was a "magnificent object, perched in a puddle of tomato sauce and heaped with pecorino". Next came 32-hour ox cheek crispy lasagne – the "ultimate cuddle on a plate" – and barbecued sea bream with *peperoncino* 'nduja butter. The thing that pleased me most about Vieni, however, was something that no restaurateur can "orchestrate": the room was filled with the cheerful "hubbub" that you only hear "when diners are genuinely happy". *About £50 a head for three courses, plus drinks and service.*

Chez Rose: confident, understated cooking

Chez Rose *5 Pollen Street, London W1 (020-7870 3730)*
Chef Spencer Metzger spent more than two decades "refining veloutés" and "tweezering caviar onto white crab meat" at establishments such as The Ritz and L'Enclume, says William Sitwell in The Daily Telegraph. So it's revealing that his own restaurant – his first – is a rather more modest place. Chez Rose is a traditional French bistro with "banquettes you step up and into" and "servers in white coats". And while it's in Mayfair and not cheap, the prices are far from "bonkers". However, the cooking is superbly confident – and understated. An "achingly good" starter of Mount Vesuvius tomatoes with peaches and basil offers the "taste of a judicious and inspired trip to the market". *Poulet rôti*, its skin crisp and golden, comes with a "delectable sauce", made from *vin jaune* and morels, of which "Auguste Escoffier would have been proud". Food this good raises the question: why on earth would anyone "wish to eat anything anywhere else?" *About £75 a head, excluding drinks and service.*

Recipe of the week

This is a dish for one of those days where you blinked somewhere around 9.45am and now find that it's somehow 8.30pm, says Richard Makin. It requires zero cooking, uses supermarket-stocked ingredients you may already have to hand, and can be on the table in ten minutes. Crisis averted!

Spicy tahini lime noodles

Serves 2

190g thin rice noodles 40g kale, destemmed and roughly chopped 1 tsp toasted sesame oil 2 tbsp tahini paste 2 tsp gochujang *(or substitute with harissa paste) 2 tbsp soy sauce (or substitute with tamari sauce) 2 tbsp lime juice 1 small garlic clove, finely minced ½ tbsp fresh ginger, minced 160g cooked edamame beans ½ cucumber, sliced 2 spring onions, sliced 2 tsp crispy chilli oil 1 tsp sesame seeds*

- Place the noodles in a large bowl and cover with boiling water. Let them soak for 5-7mins, until tender. Drain and set aside.
- While they soak, put the kale in a separate bowl, drizzle with sesame oil and massage until it softens slightly.
- In a small bowl, mix together the tahini, *gochujang*, soy sauce, lime juice, garlic and ginger for a creamy dressing.
- Add the noodles to the kale. Pour the dressing over and toss everything together until well coated.
- Divide the noodles between two bowls. Top with the edamame, cucumber, spring onion, chilli oil and sesame seeds. Serve warm or cold.

Taken from Stress-Free Dinners *by Richard Makin, published by Bloomsbury at £22. To buy from The Week Bookshop for £19.99, visit theweekbookshop.co.uk to place your order, or call 020-3176 3835 to speak to a bookseller.*

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Wine choice

In hot weather, one red grape variety "really comes into its own", says Will Lyons in The Sunday Times. And "its name is gamay". Primarily associated with Beaujolais, the grape is known for its "sappy quality, low tannins and brisk fruity flavours" – summed up by the French term *vif*, which "loosely translates as fresh, youthful and lively". At this time of year, it "offers everything: value for money, moderate alcohol, a capacity to pair with all sorts of food and the versatility to be served chilled".

For a bottle under £10, I'd recommend **2023 La Burgondie Beaujolais** (£9; Tesco). Made from grapes picked across the Beaujolais region, it has "vibrant notes of raspberry and redcurrant". **2024 Maison Riveraine Fleurie** (£13; Marks & Spencer) is a "textbook medium-bodied fleurie, with floral aromas and summery notes of violet and berry". Or try **2024 Moillard-Thomas Mâcon Rouge** (£15.50; Majestic), a wine with "tremendous energy" and notes of cherry and black pepper. For something special, **2023 Le P'tit Bonheur Coteaux Bourguignons** (£23; House of Townsend) is a "lovely red" with hints of raspberry, cherry and "the forest floor".

Consumer

The best... beach kit

◀ Anker Nano power bank A compact portable power bank will ensure that you don't run out of charge. This one has a built-in 70cm retractable USB-C cable for two-way fast charging and, at 232g, weighs about the same as an iPhone (£50; anker.com).

◀ Stanley Madeleine mini backpack soft cooler With this 13.2-litre backpack coolbag you can walk to the beach with hands free for all the other stuff. It holds up to 20 cans, and has a hinge opening for easy unpacking (£110; uk.stanley1913.com).

▲ Seaside sand baking set When they tire of sandcastles, kids can get to work with this baking set, sifting sand into the mixing bowl, scooping shells and seawater in the measuring cups, and mixing it all up with the whisk (£20; tumbletots.co.uk).

▶ Bogg Bag: The Original A TikTok sensation, this is "*the* tote of the summer". It comes in lots of fun colours, and the durable, washable design makes it easy to remove any sand left at the bottom. It measures 48x36x23cm (from £98; amazon.co.uk).

▼ Folding beach trolley A great way to transport bulky beach kit, this folding trolley has deep-tread wheels to tackle all terrains and can hold up to 60kg (on sale from £59; trail.co.uk).

▲ Spikeball Standard 3-Ball Kit The aim of this simple but addictive game is to bounce the ball on the mini trampoline without it hitting the sand. It needs less beach space to play than frisbee or volleyball, and is lightweight and easy to pack (£59; lightning-sports.co.uk).

◀ Scuddles extra-large picnic blanket At over 2m x 2m, this larger-than-average picnic blanket is good for families and groups. It has a waterproof backing and folds into a carrying case (£34; amazon.co.uk).

◀ Coleman Sundome Shelter A beach tent provides essential shade for babies and the fair-skinned, and will be more stable than a parasol. This lightweight one has a UPF 50+ rating (£35; becingoldmells.co.uk).

▶ Chillbo Shwaggins inflatable lounger To inflate this lounger, you just wave it around. It has loops for anchoring it to the ground, and useful side pockets, too (£41; amazon.co.uk).

SOURCES: GOOD HOUSEKEEPING/COUNTRYLIVING.COM

Tips of the week... how to stay alert after a late night

- Take a cold shower. The temperature drop will trigger the release of neurotransmitters that boost alertness.
- Delay your first coffee for at least an hour. It will be more effective later and less likely to trigger a crash after. Have it with breakfast, which should be something low-sugar and high-carb, such as bircher muesli, porridge or wholemeal toast.
- Half an hour in the gym or walking up and down the stairs for ten minutes will boost cognitive control.
- Morning daylight helps reset the natural circadian rhythm, so get outside. Even sitting next to a window can help. To beat the midday slump, go for a short walk.
- Don't scoff sugary snacks for a boost as these may leave you more groggy.
- Drink an espresso immediately before taking a short nap. You'll wake up 15 minutes later feeling doubly boosted.
- To stay focused on a monotonous task, try chewing mint-flavoured gum.

SOURCE: THE TIMES

And for those who have everything...

Antoni Gaudí's Sagrada Família church in Barcelona has been under construction for 144 years. This 12,060-piece 62cm-high model is the largest Lego building set ever made, and follows the same construction sequence as the real building, including the recently added cross on the central tower. Pre-order now for delivery in November.

£650; lego.com

SOURCE: STUFF

Apps... the best travel apps for 2026

Hopper helps find and secure the best price on flights, accommodation and car rental. It tracks prices, advises when to book and when the price might rise. You can book via the app and pay for price-freeze protection.

Busbud is designed to make your journey via bus, train or ferry worldwide as smooth as possible. You can compare various options and book tickets via the app and get notifications for travel updates.

If you're looking for a hotel room at the last minute, try **Hotel Tonight**, which specialises in same-day reservations, often at big discounts (but does advanced ones too).

Viator is a great resource for booking tickets for tours, experiences and attractions. Their quality can "vary dramatically", however, from place to place.

Find the perfect spot to camp or glamp in the UK and North America with **Hipcamp**. It has partnered with private landowners as well as established campsites, and shows real-time availability.

SOURCE: PC MAG

This week's dream: sun, sea and sophistication on the Costa Brava

In the 1970s, the Costa Brava was "a bright and breezy British holiday favourite", a package tour favourite that was often confused with the Costas Blanca and del Sol, says Paul Richardson in Condé Nast Traveller. Yet most of Catalonia's "Wild Coast" has never conformed to this "manufactured" sun, sea and sangria image. Stretching from Blanes, an hour north of Barcelona, to the French border, it's a "complex jigsaw" of "craggy headlands" and "jewel-like coves", much of which is too "rugged" for "wholesale tourist development". It has a history of attracting "artists, actors and bohemians". And recently, it has seen another "vibe shift", with a new wave of stylish restaurants and hotels.

The coastal town of Cadaqués: "perfect" bays with "cerulean" waters

Lloret de Mar, in the south, is "the Benidorm of Catalonia", with its "great sweep of urban beach", but the further north you go, the wilder – and less built-up – the coast becomes. There are "pleasant" harbour towns such as Palamós and Palafrugell, and then comes the great Bay of Roses, "like a vision of the Mediterranean in its pristine, pre-touristic state". Beyond that lie lovely Cadaqués and Portlligat (where Salvador and Gala Dalí converted a fisherman's house in 1930 "to live out their bonkers lifestyle"), and yet more "perfect" little bays, all with sandy beaches and "cerulean" waters. It's well worth heading inland, too. This region – the Empordà – is known as "the Spanish Tuscany" for the "luxuriant beauty" of its landscape. Set among its olive groves and cork-oak forests are "somnolent" medieval hamlets, such as pretty Madremanya – and also, of course, the "delightful" city of Girona.

The region is known for its "experimental modern cuisine", and has 15 Michelin-starred restaurants including El Celler de Can Roca, a "world-beating gastro temple" in Girona. Its owners, the Roca brothers, have also opened an "extraordinary" hotel, Esperit Roca, in a fortress nearby. And there are plenty of other pleasant hotels besides, including Palau Fugit, in Girona, and the "glorious" Hostal de la Gavina, in S'Agaró.

Getting the flavour of…

An epic run in the African bush

The Okavango to Tsodilo Ultra-Trail run, through the wilderness of Botswana, is billed as a great adventure for visitors who "don't just want to see" this part of Africa, but to "feel it underfoot", says Simon Mills in The Times. Organised by the safari company Desert & Delta, and now taking place every April, the 60-mile route links two Unesco World Heritage Sites – the Okavango Delta, and the ancient Tsodilo Hills. It takes three days and four nights (spent in lodges and camps), and I found the pace pretty "easygoing" (this isn't a race), leaving time to take in the surroundings. A support vehicle was quickly on site to rescue me when an elephant came alarmingly close. And we ran alongside local people, which made for a deeper sense of connection with Botswana, as did the chance to see the amazing cave art in Tsodilo. *Cirrcular (cirrcular.com) has a six-night all-inclusive trip from £7,355pp.*

Ancient and new attractions on Lewis

There's no more impressive sight on the Isle of Lewis than Calanais, says Helen Ochyra in The Sunday Times. This neolithic stone circle (pictured) is a mighty thing, with menhirs up to 4.8m tall, and though it's smaller than Stonehenge, it's rather more atmospheric thanks to its setting – all "emerald and russet moorland, glassy lochs and vast hill-rumpled horizons". Yet it's far from the only reason to visit the northernmost island in the Outer Hebrides, which has seen several appealing developments since my last visit a decade ago. Among them are new art galleries, restaurants and "cool" cafés in Harris; a new visitor centre at Calanais, with plenty of things for children to do; and Uig Sands, a new restaurant with rooms beside the beach of the same name, which is one of the most magnificent in the world.

Inspiring design in the Arizona desert

Built in a piecemeal, "experimental" fashion from 1937 as his winter home and studio, Taliesin West is one of the architect Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpieces, says Jonathan Thompson in The Daily Telegraph – an object lesson in the power of design to make us feel "happier" and "more creative". A low-slung complex set in the desert outside Phoenix, Arizona, it seems to melt into the "rust-coloured" mountains behind it, and its "dramatic" sunlit rooms all feel connected to their natural surroundings. From "ingenious" geometric furniture to acrylic roofs that work as "giant light diffusers", and "tight" hallways leading into grand open spaces, the "design tricks" Wright used are fascinating. I particularly loved the building's "prow", a triangular vantage point that extends over the desert. I left feeling "joyful" and inspired.

Hotel of the week

Le Lappe

Montevarchi, Italy

The wooded area around Montevarchi in Tuscany is less pretty than neighbouring Chianti, and is consequently less visited. But its "raw" quality appeals to some, says Maria Shollenbarger in the FT – and this country hotel is a stylish base from which to explore it. Occupying two old stone houses, it has just been made over by the American designer Remy Renzullo (who revamped Castle Howard). The 11 rooms feature antiques, designer textiles, and "Arcadian" murals by the Florentine painter Assia Pallavicino, and there are communal reading rooms, a bar, a restaurant, a pool and beautiful gardens. *Doubles from €350; lelappe.com.*

Football star who became known as "King Kev"

Kevin Keegan 1951-2026

Kevin Keegan was "not indulging in false modesty" when he wrote in his memoir that "I was the mongrel who made it to Crufts, and that was fine by me." He was a brilliant player, said The Guardian – a 5ft 8in-tall "bundle of energy" with speed, stamina and a "predator's opportunism" – but he was not as naturally gifted as some. It was drive and hard work that propelled the diminutive miner's son from Doncaster to the forefront of English football in the 1970s. Keegan emerged as a star player at Liverpool, scoring 100 goals in 323 appearances, and helping the club to win three First Division titles, the Uefa Cup twice, the FA Cup and the European Cup. At Hamburg, from 1977, he became the only English player to win the Ballon d'Or twice, and helped the side win the Bundesliga. Yet Keegan would become most beloved at Newcastle United. Having dropped down a division to join the Magpies from Southampton in 1982, he was received as a "visiting deity", said The Daily Telegraph – and, within two seasons, he had helped Newcastle back to the First Division. For the Toon Army, Keegan was "King Kev".

Keegan: "the mongrel who made it to Crufts"

One of the more extraordinary moments of his career came when he retired in 1984. Following a testimonial match against his old team Liverpool, Keegan was carried away from the pitch in a helicopter to the cheers of more than 36,000 fans. Another came in 1996, by which time he was Newcastle manager. During a tense premiership race, Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson had claimed that other teams did not try as hard against Newcastle as they did against his side. Keegan, who was prone to emotional outbursts, took the bait. In a live post-match interview, the exhausted manager snapped. Ranting that Ferguson had disrespected his players and gone down in his estimation, he finished with words that would follow him around for years: "I will love it if we beat them! Love it!" If Ferguson had been playing mind games, they worked: Newcastle faltered, and Man U won the 1995/96 league by four points.

> *"His father – a Geordie and a passionate Newcastle fan – bought Kevin his first football boots with the proceeds of a win at the races"*

Joseph Kevin Keegan was born in Doncaster in 1951, and brought up in a house with no electricity or inside lavatory. His father – a Geordie and a passionate Newcastle fan – bought Kevin his first football boots with the proceeds of a win at the races. At primary school, Keegan played football in a team run by the headteacher, Sister Mary Oliver, whom he cited as a crucial early influence. He said that a line she wrote in his school report – "Kevin's football must be encouraged" – had imbued him with vital self-belief; and that he had learnt something from her humility too. "She showed me there is no 'us' and 'them', and that if there is a job to be done you should do it," he recalled.

Having left school at 15, he was working at a brass foundry and playing for local teams when he was spotted by a scout, which led to him being signed as an apprentice by fourth division Scunthorpe in 1968. He made his league debut aged 17. Before long, "bigger clubs came knocking". In 1971, Liverpool signed him for £33,000, on £50 a week. Unusually, Keegan had insisted on negotiating his own terms. At Liverpool, he came under the influence of the great Bill Shankly, and developed an on-pitch partnership with fellow striker John Toshack so intuitive that Granada TV sent a team to explore whether they were telepathic. Keegan made his England debut in 1972, in a World Cup qualifier; in the 1972/73 season, Liverpool won the First Division title, said The Times – their first trophy since 1965/66.

Later highlights of his six years at Liverpool included the two goals he contributed to the team's 3-0 victory over Newcastle in the 1974 FA Cup final. A low point came a few months later, when he was targeted by Leeds players (notoriously aggressive at the time), and ended up trading punches with Billy Bremner. Both were sent off and received 11-match bans. During that enforced break, Keegan married his girlfriend Jean, whom he had met on the waltzer at a fair in Doncaster four years earlier, when they were both teenagers; she survives him, along with their two daughters.

In 1976, he was made England captain; Liverpool won the First Division and he became yet more widely known owing to a celebrated appearance on the TV show *Superstars*. By then, he had decided to leave Liverpool, and the next year he signed for Hamburg, for £500,000 on a reported salary of £122,000pa – "six times what he'd been earning at Liverpool". Before heading to Germany, Keegan went to a hairdresser and emerged with a bubble perm. Jean burst out laughing when she saw it, but his curls kicked off a regrettable trend in 1970s football, and helped make him famous well beyond the world of sport. He struggled at first in Germany, but it was there that his surprising strength and power won him the nickname "Mighty Mouse". In 1980, he moved to Southampton, where he won the Golden Boot. In November 1981, England qualified for the World Cup – España 82 – for the first time in 12 years. But, "heartbreakingly for Keegan", said The Times, he suffered a back injury before the tournament. He made just one appearance, as a late substitute in a match against Spain, only to miss a clear chance on goal – "the sort of header I'd scored all my life". England were eliminated; Keegan's international career was over.

Having grown up on tales of Newcastle's past glories, he said that signing for the Toon in the early 1980s "felt like coming home". He retired two years later, aged 33. But after seven years in Spain, playing golf and hardly even watching football, he returned to Newcastle as manager. He paid with his own money for the training ground to be renovated, then set about creating an exciting attacking side, deploying techniques he had learnt from Shankly to motivate his players. After Newcastle were promoted in 1993, he used his new leverage to demand the funds to buy star players, including, for a record £15m, Alan Shearer – who, aged 13, had been a ball boy at St James' Park for Keegan's last match as a player. Fans were shocked when he quit in 1997; it turned out that he'd grown disillusioned by boardroom politics. He worked next at Fulham, and on the back of his success there he was made England manager, after the sacking of Glenn Hoddle in 1999. It didn't go well: he resigned in the dressing room toilets at Wembley Stadium following England's 1-0 loss to Germany in a World Cup qualifier. In 2008, he made an emotional return to Newcastle, only to leave again a few months later, after a bitter falling out with owner Mike Ashley. Football, he reflected in his autobiography, had given him everything – "except a happy ending".

Companies in the news

...and how they were assessed

CXMT: market-shaking debut

Communist Party bigwigs in Beijing couldn't have wished for a better showcase of China's "push to develop domestic AI suppliers to rival Western giants", said DealBook in The New York Times. Shares in the local chip champion, ChangXin Memory Technologies, aka CXMT, rose by an "absurd" 466% on their first day of trading in Shanghai this week, said Due Diligence in the Financial Times – briefly transforming the formerly low-profile firm into China's most valuable company, worth $547bn (a badge usually held by Tencent), as "AI fever" gripped the country. Based in Hefei, in the eastern province of Anhui, CXMT is the world's fourth-biggest maker of memory chips (after South Korea's SK Hynix and Samsung, and America's Micron) and was founded by China's newly crowned "memory king" Zhu Yiming. The company has already been courted by the likes of Apple to supply chips for some of its devices, and has "deep relations with Europe's chipmaking supply chain", after acquiring "critical patents" from a bankrupt German company, Qimonda, in 2019. The "Xin" in ChangXin Memory Technologies is composed of three of the characters for "gold" stacked on top of each other: "what better epitome of the AI gold rush"?

Barclays Bank: tempting fate?

In mid-July, Wall Street's biggest investment banks reported a record earnings quarter. Judging by Barclays' latest results, British banks are in the money, too. The bank, which is led by C.S. Venkatakrishnan ("Venkat"), "raised annual income guidance and confirmed a fresh £1bn share buyback" after enjoying surging second-quarter revenues and a 31% rise in profits, reported Christopher Akers in Investors' Chronicle. Cue predictable calls for a beefed-up banking "surcharge". First onto that bandwagon, said Helen Cahill in The Times, was TUC general secretary Paul Nowak, who observed that "big banks like Barclays are raking it in while working people and local businesses are struggling". This is a chance for the new Government "to show whose side they're on". Calls for a tax raid have been boosted by the revelation that Barclays increased its half-year bonus pool by around 30% to £1.3bn, said Kalyeena Makortoff in The Guardian. Still, Venkat – who met John Healey "as Burnham's Cabinet took shape last week" – is preparing to fight his corner. His line is that any constraint on bank finances could weigh on bank loans crucial to supporting UK growth. "I want to make the point that for every pound of capital that's retained in the banking system, we lend £8 to £10 into the economy," he said.

Johnson & Johnson: baby powder settlement

In a landmark deal "that could end a contentious legal battle that has dogged the company for a decade", Johnson & Johnson has offered to pay $5.5bn to resolve 76,000 US lawsuits alleging that its baby powder, and other products containing talcum, cause ovarian cancer, said Dietrich Knauth on Reuters. The final bill could top $7bn, but the US healthcare giant does not admit responsibility, arguing that the claims are "meritless" and that it is settling purely "to get closure". The company has always denied its talc was contaminated with the carcinogen asbestos, said Osmond Chia on BBC News, and it won a case in July. Even so, in 2022 it changed its formula for "commercial" reasons. All J&J baby powder is now made of "cornstarch". Shares jumped around 2% in response.

Seven days in the Square Mile

Blockbuster earnings from the Korean chipmaker SK Hynix, judged disappointing by some, failed to quell a disorderly global retreat from chip stocks that caused chaos on South Korea's bourse, spread to Japan and Europe (where shares in the Dutch tech giant ASML lost nearly 15%), and threatened to plunge Wall Street's Nasdaq into correction territory. Tensions continued in the run-up to results from US Big Tech firms this week. The price of oil retreated after rising above $100/barrel last week, as the US and Iran paused strikes. President Donald Trump announced a renewed tariff blitz.

The NIESR economic think-tank warned that the Burnham Government is facing a £24bn real-terms spending squeeze as inflation bites, meaning "very difficult trade-offs" in the autumn Budget. The forecast suggests that "higher and more persistent inflation" will erode the impact of increased spending.

Coca-Cola and Unilever reported surging sales volumes and raised their forecasts after a World Cup marketing bonanza. Unilever notched up its best quarterly performance since 2010; Coke, which sponsored mid-half "hydration breaks", reported an 8% rise in sales of its Powerade drink. Shein, the Chinese cheap fashion giant, swung into a $99m loss – blaming the removal of *de minimis* US import duty exemptions on small packages. Drugmaker GSK is to shut its historic Stevenage site and switch its research centre to Cambridge.

Segro/DCC/Mitie: the continuing plunder of London

For a few hours last week, "it seemed possible we were about to witness a rare stock market event", said Nils Pratley in The Guardian: "a FTSE 100 company holding out" against a US hostile raider. Sadly, the board of warehouse landlord Segro – one of the few vehicles that offers "direct exposure to UK and European data centre and logistics development" – has "capitulated". The £14bn offer from San Franciscan giant Prologis is "the biggest FTSE takeover so far in the current bid-heavy year" – and also "the most depressing". It shows that "even when boards are up for a real scrap" (not always the case), "the dead hand of institutional money intervenes". In Segro's case, shareholders led by Norway's sovereign wealth fund provided the pressure.

A Segro warehousing hub in Italy

The Segro/Prologis saga is one of several bids currently "raging on the London Stock Exchange", as US competitors and private equity firms steam in, said The Sunday Times. Others up for grabs – at a time of dwindling IPOs – include fund manager Schroders, easyJet, outsourcer Mitie, testing giant Intertek and energy group DCC. The direction of travel is now so pronounced, there are fears that London could "become a desert". Certainly, on current trends, "the market would be empty by 2057".

If Britain has become "the buyout brigade's happiest hunting ground", said Nils Pratley, John Healey has become the latest chancellor charged with reversing the trend. He'll face the usual calls to cut stamp duty on shares to boost trading and ramp up "domestic biases" that encourage UK investors to back local firms, said Mauricio Alencar in City AM. The Government's new £1bn UK Scale-up Fund, channelling pension cash into tech startups, could be just a taster. New rules for Isas next?

Talking points

Issue of the week: the deepening chip rout

Shares in chipmakers globally have plunged, prompting fresh doubts about the AI trade

Who would be an investor in South Korea right now? "Despair and frustration" spread again on Wednesday as the chip-heavy Kospi index "cratered" during another "hectic session" that triggered a second successive official circuit-breaker, reported Bloomberg. The catalyst was disappointing earnings from local semiconductor giant SK Hynix but, given "already jittery sentiment" around the AI boom, it could almost have been anything. The once-booming Kospi has now lost more than 33% of its value in a month.

South Korea's Kospi: losing value fast

"The chips are down," said Bryce Elder in the FT – especially in the red-hot memory sector. Some have pinned the "chip dip", which has also hit Wall Street with force, on the IPO of Chinese challenger CXMT; others on reports that a state-owned Chinese company is beginning mass production of "immersion deep-ultra lithography machines" – advanced chip manufacturing tools over which the West (especially the Dutch giant ASML) currently enjoys a monopoly. Still, the more obvious concern is "demand destruction", in what has always been a volatile and highly cyclical sector. Voracious demand from America's big AI hyperscalers has sent chip prices sky-high. "All that's needed to wreck 2027 sales expectations is for this cycle to turn from virtuous to vicious. Plus ça change…"

Could China do for chips what it has already done for cars? That's the fear on the Nasdaq, said Eliot Brown in The Wall Street Journal. As Elon Musk recently told The Economist, Chinese manufacturers are "closer than most people realise to solving the lithography problem". Chinese companies have been restricted from buying the cutting-edge machines – which is why they are "a step behind the US in advanced chipmaking".

Yet what's particularly concerning about the plummeting shares of chipmakers, said DealBook in The New York Times, is that the rout coincides with a broader crisis of confidence on Wall Street about AI-related corporate debt and "circular" financial arrangements. That was rammed home when it emerged that chip giant Nvidia – increasingly "the central bank of the AI economy" – is brokering a $250bn guarantee for OpenAI's immense Ohio campus. "Throughout history, almost every generational infrastructure leap has relied on hardware titans to co-sign their buyers' credit." But this has also led to devastating "debt crashes". The chief winner of the current turmoil is Apple, said the FT. It has reclaimed its crown as the world's most valuable company, with a $5trn valuation, because it is seen as a relative "haven". The same is true of the FTSE 100, which has hit an all-time high as an "anti-tech" index. Swings and roundabouts.

Burnham and taxes: what the experts think

● Taxing times

"You can have as many headlines as you like about this tax or something else," said Andy Burnham this week, as he posited tax rises to pay for social care, so as to avoid people having to sell their homes. "But when people are losing hundreds of thousands of pounds, everything they've worked for, well, what about them?" Seldom has the threat of a big overhaul in wealth taxes loomed so large, said Maisie Grice in City AM, with capital gains tax (CGT) in particular thought to be a target.

Burnham and Swinney in Glasgow

● Uplifts and down drafts

Suggested measures include aligning CGT rates – currently levied at 18% for basic rate taxpayers and at 24% for those on higher and additional rates – with income tax; and removing the "CGT uplift" after death. At present, the taxman ignores "gains accrued over a lifetime", taxing assets at their original acquisition costs. But the removal of the "uplift" could mean a "one-two punch" for bereaved families, said Ed Wood, financial planning director at Rathbones. Not only would they be subject to inheritance tax (IHT) – but to a large CGT bill too. The seven-year rule, enabling gifts to be made tax-free, or at a tapered rate before death, also looks under threat, said Melissa Lawford in The Daily Telegraph. We might also expect further tinkering with IHT "nil-rate bands", currently worth around £24bn a year.

● Squeaking pips

The tax change that would "do most for the economy" would be a land value tax (LVT), replacing the current inequitable council tax, said Phillip Inman in The Guardian. This would also have the advantage of being almost impossible for the super-rich to dodge "because they cannot shift the land they own overseas". Some Burnham advisers are also urging him to tackle the sacred cow of income tax. Beware the law of unintended consequences, said Brian Monteith in The Scotsman. Figures from the think-tank Tax Policy Associates suggest that the SNP's move to create a 48% top rate of income tax "may have cost Scotland around £22m in lost revenues in its first year" – bearing out economist Arthur Laffer's theory that there is a limit to how far taxes can be raised before receipts begin to fall. In this instance, "the joke" is on First Minister John Swinney.

Summer shorts

Short sellers have been having "a rough year", said DealBook in The New York Times: they're down more than $200bn. But SpaceX is cheering everyone up:

● The records at SpaceX continue, said Sheryar Siddiq on Insider Monkey. Having staged the world's biggest-ever IPO – momentarily reaching a $2.1trn value – SpaceX has become "the most widely shorted newly listed stock Wall Street has ever tracked". Data company S3 Partners reckons punters wagering against Elon Musk's rocket and AI company have cleared nearly $7.3bn in mark-to-market profits since its IPO in June. The total $26bn in shorts is a fraction of SpaceX's current $1.49trn market cap, but now accounts for "roughly 35%" of its entire float (i.e. shares available to trade).

● SpaceX has become the second-most profitable short this year – behind Musk's Tesla, which has gifted doubters nearly $9.1bn in paper profits, noted S3 Partners. Unsurprisingly, Musk isn't taking this dual blow well – predicting that SpaceX shorters will eventually meet a sticky end. That's "a red flag" in itself, said The Motley Fool. "When a CEO obsesses over short-sellers, it can signal deeper risks." Investors will get a first proper look at SpaceX's performance on 4 August, when it files its first quarterly earnings report, said Insider Monkey. Expect "a fresh test for both bulls and short sellers".

Trump's new wall of tariffs

Hakyung Kim

Financial Times

President Trump has kicked off another major wave of tariffs – "a comeback, of sorts", after the Supreme Court overturned his "emergency levies" in February, says Hakyung Kim. Call it the policy that refuses to die. Having mined old statutes for dormant provisions, the administration's goal is to make this second wave "more robust to legal challenge than the first". Thus, some 60 trading partners are being hit with 10%-12.5% duties for their alleged failure to prevent products made using "forced labour" to enter their supply chains. The market response has been "almost invisible", especially in contrast to the violent reaction on "liberation day" last year – traders are betting again on the "Taco trade". But they may be underpricing the risks. Overturning the emergency tariffs left a fiscal hole that the administration needs to fill to offset the estimated $4.7trn deficit increase from Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill tax and spending measures. The new tariffs don't fully fill the void, making it unlikely that the US will strike deals with trading partners for lower rates. Indeed, as Standard Chartered notes, "the odds are it will look for more".

State capitalism: back in fashion

Editorial

Bloomberg

Britain's new PM, Andy Burnham, wants to bring privatised utilities, including water and transport, back under public control. Far from being an outlier, he's part of an alarming global trend, says Bloomberg. Politicians globally are "showing renewed enthusiasm for public ownership of private companies" – ranging from taking "modest" stakes in firms in key industries (a Trump speciality) to outright nationalisation. Whether driven by worries about supply-chain resilience, deindustrialisation, national security or "profiteering" – or all of the above – this interventionism is "unlikely to end well". In fact, state control has nearly always proved a mistake. The great challenge for any industrial policy is "to avoid capture" – putting producers' interests over customers and the public. Far from solving this problem, "public ownership entrenches it". When decision-makers are regulating themselves, it leads to "inefficiency and chronic underperformance". True, the regulation of private companies can sometimes fail, but competition and private enterprise remain the keys to economic success. "From time to time, that truth has to be rediscovered."

Is the World Cup up for sale?

Editorial

The Irish Times

Everyone, from Uefa's bigwigs to Andy Burnham, is up in arms over Fifa's plan to sell stakes in the World Cup's commercial operations, says The Irish Times. But should we give Gianni Infantino a break? Fifa claims the new body would simplify operations by focusing all money-making endeavours in one place. Crucially, Fifa's governing body would "retain sole control" of the new venture, Fifa Forward Enterprise (FFE), while allowing third parties to make investments. Infantino argues that the deal is "all about the democratisation of football worldwide": Fifa promises that external investment would deliver $20m in extra funding to any national association that wants it. All they have to do is vote in favour of the new plan. The launch of the FFE has "caught football by surprise", and there are bound to be more questions and "further expressions of discontent" (note that the proposed lead investor of the FFE is Joshua Kushner – brother of Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared). But whether any football stakeholder has the gumption to stop the plan is uncertain.

Status death for the apex predators

Schumpeter

The Economist

Capitalism's status hierarchy is being upturned, says Schumpeter. Wall Street banks are no longer the "apex predators". "The bright lights of finance" are suddenly being topped by friends in AI, who are not only earning "bigger bucks" but threatening to consume their industry. The luxury industry, too, has been "swept up in this wave of abasement": the handbag and suit makers are suffering. This is a big deal because the modern worker is "status-obsessed". "If management gurus agree on anything it is that individuals care deeply about their relative standing within their firm." The biggest of bosses find time to post on LinkedIn, "a social network that functions as a forum for gloating". For some, the new displacement amounts to nothing less than "status death". Complaints from those who feel "status-mugged" are increasingly common. But it's not all bad news. After all, "fear of status death can be a spur to great things". The "nauseating feeling" of arriving at a party too late has prompted "generations of entrepreneurs to leave and start another". In my end is my beginning.

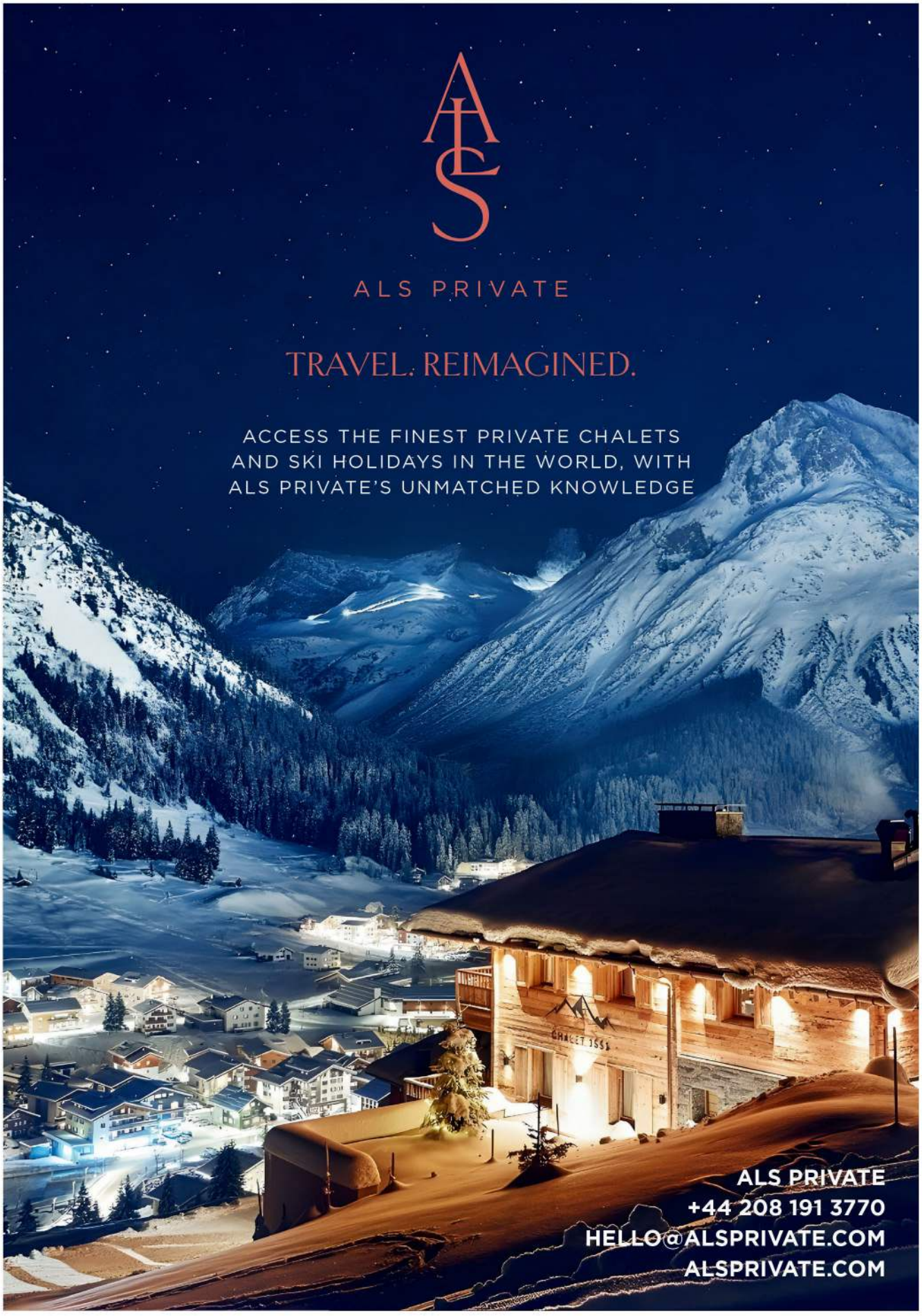
City profiles

Bernard Arnault

Shares in LVMH have been gaining, on "hopes of a turnaround" at the world's largest luxury-goods group, said The New York Times. But the story everyone's talking about "is Bernard Arnault's social media savoir-faire". The 77-year-old tycoon delivered a rebuttal to an investigation by Le Monde so "dripping with sarcasm" that it became a sensation. Responding to claims that LVMH doesn't have "a single sloppily dressed or overweight employee", Arnault apologised for a "failure of bodily diversity", promising to "raise the matter with the company canteen". He congratulated the paper for its "scoop" that LVMH has a "business-first strategy", before leaving a trail of other zingers. His open letter has generated nine million views and garnered "hat tips" from half of Silicon Valley. *Pas mal…*

Julie Masino

The Cracker Barrel boss remarked in December that she felt she had been "fired by America" after a backlash over the vintage restaurant group's "woke" rebranding. Now she has been fired for real, said The Wall Street Journal – with a $4.6m payout. Masino had sought to update Cracker Barrel, by reworking its "folksy logo", changing the menu and "pulling antique tchotchkes off the walls" – only to spark a political firestorm, fanned by President Trump, that wiped out half the Tennessee-based chain's value. Since then, Masino has managed to regain investors' trust so fully that shares tumbled on news of her departure. Her trauma is reflected in the terms of the severance package, said The Times. Masino is getting "personal security protection, indefinitely".



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Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

BHP Group
The Times
Excellent finances and a focus on future-facing commodities should see the diversified miner through potential volatility. Upping copper production by 30% to meet demand from EVs and infrastructure for renewables. Buy. £31.66.

Focusrite
Investors' Chronicle
A "return to stardom" is on the cards for this audio equipment specialist, which has developed a software platform using its own chips – the better to lock users into its ecosystem and embed a "market-leading position". Buy. 240p.

Greencore Group
Investors' Chronicle
Business is "gaining momentum" for the sandwich-maker behind many UK supermarket "meal deals". Should achieve £15m in savings from the acquisition of rival Bakkavor. Profits are beating expectations. Buy. 248p.

Howden Joinery Group
Citywire
Peel Hunt has upgraded the kitchen-maker after shares slipped alongside those of its builders' merchants peers. UK revenues are up 3%; international revenues by 13%. Target 970p. Buy. 780p.

ITV
The Times
The demerger of the ITV Studios arm from its broadcast business offers a rare chance to buy into a "world-beating" production operation cheaply. The 6.8% yield looks "nailed on" until the demerger goes through. Buy. 74.1p.

Jet2
The Times
The package-holiday group's "cheap" valuation is down to a tough short-term outlook. But strong finances are enabling a fleet upgrade to boost its competitive position, and a £250m buyback programme. Buy. £14.63.

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

Burberry Group
Citywire
Recovery is already priced into the luxury fashion label's shares, reckons Berenberg, with sales "broadly in line" with expectations. There remain margin concerns and shares have dropped nearly 20% this year. Hold. £10.60.

Coca-Cola HBC
The Times
Shares in the bottling behemoth have "bubbled up" to a new high, boosted by fast emerging growth markets, especially Nigeria and Egypt. Strong pricing power helps. Boasts an excellent dividend record. Hold. £48.16.

Compass Group
Investors' Chronicle
A strong pipeline of new clients and excellent retention rates have helped the corporate catering giant deliver 7.1% revenue growth. Capex is set to rise as it embeds new contracts and builds presence in Europe. Hold. $31.07.

Foxtons Group
Citywire
Slow sales and issues in the lettings arm following the Renters' Rights Act have led the London-focused estate agent to cut profit guidance by 21% for 2026, and by 15% in 2027. New target 40p, says Peel Hunt. Hold. 41p.

Frasers Group
Investors' Chronicle
Sales grew 8% at the Sports Direct owner, but profits fell just shy of guidance. The group has declined to provide guidance for next year amid uncertainty over takeover bids for Hugo Boss and Accent Group. Hold. 743p.

Ocado Group
Investors' Chronicle
Lacklustre interims offer little evidence of a "much-hoped-for" turnaround at the online grocer. Lossmaking, with "anaemic prospects" after two US grocers shuttered their Ocado-licensed warehouses. Sell. 193p.

Directors' dealings

Fevara

The livestock supplement producer (formerly Carr's Group) is pushing into Brazil, the world's largest beef cattle market, to unlock faster growth. Non-executive director Tim Jones has boosted his holding – spending £68,675 on shares.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip
Halfords Group
Citywire
up 65.07% to 241p

Worst tip
Relx
The Times
up 6.83% to £28.32

Market view

"The latest selloff in chipmakers shows that doubts over [AI] spending, returns and valuations are still deepening rather than fading."
Hebe Chen, of Vantage Global Prime, quoted on Reddit's WallStreetBets

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	28 July 2026	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	10871.02	10585.91	2.69%
FTSE All-share UK	5839.12	5697.15	2.49%
Dow Jones	52882.36	52342.67	1.03%
NASDAQ	24951.67	25826.98	−3.39%
Nikkei 225	62364.92	66232.19	−5.84%
Hang Seng	25310.85	25132.29	0.71%
Gold	4044.33	4073.67	−0.72%
Brent Crude Oil	84.53	91.51	−7.63%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	2.96%	3.01%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.94	5.03	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.59	4.63	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	2.6% (Jun)	2.8% (May)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	3.0% (Jun)	3.1% (May)	
Lloyds house price (yoy)	0.6% (Jun)	0.5% (May)	

£1 STERLING: $1.329 €1.167 ¥217.461 Bitcoin $63,837.40

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

RISES	Price	% change
3i Group	2913.00	+16.38
Relx	2832.00	+15.40
Segro	997.00	+14.72
The Sage Group	940.00	+12.50
JD Sports Fashion	95.00	+10.60
FALLS		
Centrica	155.00	-10.91
Polar Capital Technology	611.00	-6.65
Glencore	507.00	-4.05
SSE	2352.00	-4.00
Rentokil Initial	431.00	-3.54
FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER		
Hays	65.00	+19.89
Vesuvius	372.00	-17.77

Source: FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 28 July (pm)

Following the Footsie

6-month movement in the FTSE 100 index

The grate cheddar robbery: why criminals are targeting cheese

In 2024, Neal's Yard Dairy was duped out of more than £300,000-worth of artisanal cheddar by criminals posing as French supermarket buyers. Experts suspect it headed to Russia, which has a thriving black market in high-end foods. Olivia Potts reports

For a cheese lover, Neal's Yard may be heaven on earth. Enter the Covent Garden branch through its distinctively inky blue front, and you can be in no doubt as to what awaits. An enormous window shows off at least a dozen truckles and wheels of cheese. Inside, low-hanging orb lamps glow softly, illuminating the startling array. Huge wheels of Stichelton and Stilton stand stacked on top of one another, their steel-blue veins facing out. Baron Bigod – the British Brie de Meaux (and, whisper it, better than the French equivalent) – oozes suggestively. Yorkshire pecorino gleams pale, smooth, and yoghurty. Neat writing on large and small blackboards displays the cheese names, origins, and prices.

Westcombe's Tom Calver: "When an offer like that comes on, you jump at it"

Randolph Hodgson, a food scientist, and Nicholas Saunders, an activist and entrepreneur, founded the Neal's Yard Dairy in 1979. In the earliest of days, it just produced Greek yogurt. British cheese wasn't really known in the UK, let alone on the world stage. But Neal's Yard persevered. Now there are five brick-and-mortar stores, in different parts of London. Underneath the railway arches in Bermondsey, the cheeses of Neal's Yard sit maturing in a beloved institution that these days sells around 550 tonnes of British cheese a year in every corner of the cheese world.

So it wasn't beyond the realms of belief when a big, fat order came in for artisanal cheddar in 2024. A French supermarket wanted to purchase 950 truckles, worth around £300,000. Three different dairies were called upon to help fulfil the massive request: Westcombe Dairy, making their eponymous cheddar in Somerset; the Trethowan Brothers, making Pitchfork Cheddar, also in Somerset; and Holden Farm Dairy, making Hafod Cheddar in West Wales. "British cheese has had a massive revival over the past 30 years, but unfortunately, it does feel like that has plateaued off a little bit," says Tom Calver, head cheesemaker at Westcombe Dairy. "To keep going, keep surviving, all throughout the whole chain, when an offer like that comes on, you jump on it." Twenty-two tonnes of artisanal British cheese, some of the most expensive cheese made in the UK. A huge order for Neal's Yard. It almost seemed too good to be true.

> *"Literally everything is done by hand. Cheesemakers mix the salt in with great metal pitchforks. They fling the curd around"*

Cheesemakers are really, really strong. Ben Ticehurst is the head cheesemaker for Trethowan Brothers, which produces Pitchfork Cheddar: "It's very physical. It's an old-fashioned job. If you were designing it with modern health and safety standards in mind, you wouldn't make cheeses that weigh 25kg." Artisanal cheese is a very different beast from commodity or "block" cheese.

"The big difference is, when we say handmade, it genuinely is handmade. Literally everything is done by hand," Ticehurst explains. "When we're mixing the salt in, we don't have mechanical mixers, we have great big metal pitchforks, which is where our name comes from, and we do it by hand. We fling the curd around, we mill the sheets by hand, the cheddaring is done by hand, the moving and setting the presses, the cheeses are moved and lifted up. It is incredibly labour-intensive."

"Cheddaring" is a unique step in the process: to achieve the distinctive dense texture and intense, sharp, hits-you-in-the-back-of-the-nose flavour that makes you go back for another piece, the curd blocks are cut into "loaves", stacked, turned, and piled on top of one another. This stacked weight forces extra whey out, increasing the acidity and creating a firm, layered structure to the finished cheese.

When the initial enquiry came into Neal's Yard, it was just about Hafod Cheddar. "[They] came to us and said, 'Can we have 22 tonnes of Hafod cheese?'" explains Patrick Holden of Holden Farm Dairy. "And we said no." Twenty-two tonnes is three-quarters of the dairy's annual production: "The most we could spare was two-and-a-half tonnes." So Westcombe Dairy and the Trethowan Brothers Dairy were recruited to fill the rest of the order. "This was a huge order," recalls Ben Ticehurst. "It took quite a bit of to-ing and fro-ing to arrange so many pallets to leave the dairy at the same time. The order had to be split into three collections." Artisanal cheesemakers try not to keep an oversupply, and forecasting can be hard, as can logistics: the cheddar has to be aged for 12 months, and storage space is tight. "With cheddar, what you have is what you have," says Ticehurst. "We just get the milk from the farm, turn the milk into cheese, and then sell what we've made. It's a much more basic and old-fashioned way of doing business." But they were delighted with the order. "We were just rather proud," recalls Holden. "We thought, 'How about that? The French are buying our cheese.'"

Neal's Yard did not immediately smell a rat. They were confident they could fulfil the order. The three dairies pulled out all the stops and got the order completed in double-quick time. The artisanal cheddars were brought together in the storage chambers beneath those railway arches in Bermondsey. Everything was going exactly to plan. And on 14 October 2024, the cheese was collected, just as it was supposed to be. But neither the cheese nor the buyer was ever seen again. The 950 truckles – roughly the weight of a fully grown whale shark – disappeared without

a trace. "We thought everything was legitimate, so we loaded up the pallets, sent them to [Neal's Yard], and they paid us," Tom Calver recalls. "It was only about two or three weeks after we'd actually sent all the cheese up that they got in contact with us and said it was a scam."

Neal's Yard Dairy sells 550 tonnes of British cheese a year

Shortly after the theft, a 63-year-old man was arrested for fraud by false representation and handling stolen goods, and was released on bail pending further enquiries. Several further arrests have since been made, but no charges have yet been brought. The Metropolitan Police recently confirmed that there are no updates on the case at this stage: "The six arrested men remain released under investigation. Enquiries are ongoing."

Food fraud is big business. People have been adulterating and stealing food for as long as we've been eating it – from smuggling to counterfeiting, hijacking lorries to run-of-the-mill theft. The World Trade Organisation estimates that food crime costs the global industry as much as $50bn a year. In recent times, a number of notoriously large thefts have occurred: $18m worth of maple syrup siphoned from a warehouse in Canada in 2012; 637 tonnes of olive oil taken from a mill in Halkidiki, Greece, in 2020; 413,793 KitKat bars pilfered in transit from Italy to Poland in March this year. But the most-stolen food in the world? Cheese.

Fifteen years earlier, 1,000 miles away in Northern Italy, in the dead of night, a group of armed thieves crept towards a locked vault. They successfully disarmed the security system, set up their truck by the warehouse to receive their spoils, and used axes to break through the facility wall. Days before, they had laid the groundwork: perimeter fencing had been opened with wire cutters. Were they looking for jewels or priceless artwork? Gold bullion, perhaps? No – parmesan. And they almost managed it. Around 400 wheels of Parmigiano Reggiano were loaded onto their getaway vehicle before police – alerted by security – apprehended the thieves.

> *"Around 400 wheels of Parmigiano Reggiano were loaded onto their getaway vehicle before police apprehended the thieves"*

Credito Emiliano SpA, where the attempted robbery happened, is, in fact, a local bank in the Emilia-Romagna region, the only place where Parmigiano Reggiano can be produced. Local parmesan makers, who have been subjected to many large-scale thefts over the years, have turned to the bank to store and protect their cheese. Such is its worth that the bank also permits the wheels of cheese to be used by producers as collateral against loans. The cheese is in a purpose-built, climate-controlled storage facility with roving patrols, motion-sensor lights, barbed-wire fencing and a manned camera control centre that can hold 300,000 wheels (which take at least a year to mature, and are worth more than £1,000 each). Fabrizio Giberti, head of the facility, calls it the "Fort Knox of cheese". It's a very popular place: the small, rural warehouses where the parmesan is made are a constant target for organised crime. Between 2012 and 2018, the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano estimated that $3m in cheese was stolen each year.

In 2016, dairy thieves in Wisconsin dubbed "cheese pirates" stole 20,000lbs of cheese worth $46,000 from a parking lot. Just a few months earlier, 100 wheels of Comté were stolen from a warehouse in Goux-les-Usiers – each wheel would cost around $2,500 today. In 2019, $187,000-worth of cheese was stolen from Saputo Dairy Products in Tavistock, Ontario: a man arrived at the business, presented paperwork, and the cheese was loaded onto a truck, only to disappear.

Cheese isn't an easy product to shift. It's big. It's heavy. It's unwieldy. It's smelly. It also needs to be held at very specific temperatures and humidity. It is its own microbiome: fat, enzymes, salt, bacteria, proteins, yeasts, moulds. All of these – plus time – conspire to change the nature of the cheese. That's why maturation is so important to the flavour and texture; it is an art form. Storing and transporting is technical and controlled. So if you're suddenly going to find yourself in possession of tonnes of artisanal cheese, you'd better be prepared. Even a refrigerated van, or a temperature-controlled storage facility, is unlikely to cut it. Smash-and-grab, opportunistic cheese theft is a fool's errand. The Neal's Yard thieves – who, after all, specifically asked for Hafod Cheddar – knew what they were dealing with. They likely had a plan, and we can make some guesses as to where their cheese ended up: Russia, many cheesemakers think.

Jamie Montgomery, a Somerset cheesemaker who was the victim of a heist on his warehouse in 1998, says: "There's no point nicking that kind of cheese and trying to flog it [in the UK], because people would know immediately. That's why the latest one had to be so sophisticated and get it out of the country." Dr Jonathan Davies, a criminologist from the University of Manchester, agrees: "You can't just turn up with a van in front of a supermarket and say, 'Hi, would you be interested in buying this?' Black market activity is probably the most likely indication."

In response to sanctions imposed following its 2014 annexation of Crimea, Russia began an aggressive ban on importing food from the US, the European Union and other countries. As a consequence, a thriving black market has sprung up in Russia for high-end foods that are no longer legally available – with cheese chief among them. Wild attempts have been made to circumvent these counter-sanctions. One chancer, who was stopped at the Russian border near Kaliningrad, was found carrying 1,000lbs of imported cheese.

It could also conceivably have found its way to America. Since 1949, the US has banned both domestic production and the import of raw-milk cheeses aged for fewer than 60 days. This means that soft, raw-milk cheeses such as Brie de Meaux, Camembert, Époisses and many others cannot be sold in America in their traditional versions. In 2014, authorities lowered the threshold for acceptable bacteria levels in cheese, further restricting access to unique and desirable varieties. Of course, cheese finds a way: a black market for regulation-flouting cheese undoubtedly exists in the US. As long ago as 2002, The New Yorker was reporting on a "raw-milk cheese underground".

When Neal's Yard was defrauded, they bore the losses themselves. The three dairies, which had worked so hard to provide the cheddar, were still paid. It can all sound like a bit of a joke: making off with hundreds of cloth-bound cheeses. But food crime is not a trivial issue. Neal's Yard doesn't want to talk about the theft of its cheddar any more. When I reached out to their director, David Lockwood, he told me they've stopped giving interviews about it: "We see it as a distraction from our work selling British cheese." But it seems inevitable that cheesemakers, mongers, and other luxury food producers are treating their experience as a cautionary tale. "It's that age-old thing," Tom Calver admits: "if it seems too good to be true, it is."

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THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1527

Two Connell Guides and two Week-branded items will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 10 August. Send it to The Week Crossword 1527, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. **Jeff Pearce**

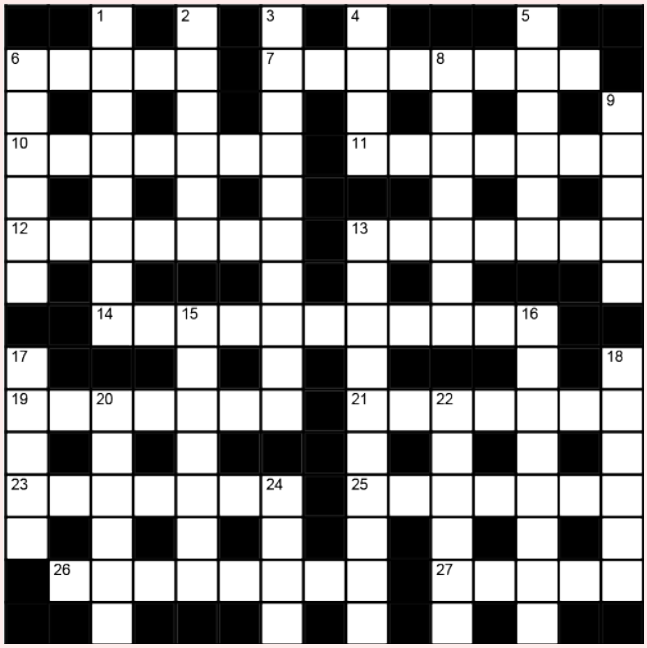
This week's winner will receive Week-branded items, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

ACROSS

6 Part of trashy enamel dog (5)
7 Repeatedly use a cloth around jelly in the lab (4-4)
10 The Globe perhaps – a final part of *Hamlet* shown in that place! (7)
11 Small friend takes in last half of Ronnie Barker (7)
12 Working with group of musicians touring a Canadian province (7)
13 Stifle son and one of his parents? (7)
14 It's something accomplished to cut vine with machete (11)
19 Key I placed in baby's bed for singer (4,3)
21 Triumphant expression from drunk in this place? (2,5)
23 Retired professors are finally due one (7)
25 One applauds person helping to make *Ring Cycle*? (7)
26 Writer has to run off to marry *Thunderbird* lady (8)
27 Picture that's covering periodical (5)

DOWN

1 Refasten broken window (8)
2 Harshly criticise one facing bowler (6)
3 Bitter lemon valet stirred (10)
4 Last part of underground is without a platform (4)
5 Pungent root is hard to cook (6)
6 Starts to halve organic tomatoes and drizzles oil generously for snack (3,3)
8 A black sole eats a shellfish (7)
9 A large weapon creates fear (5)
13 Sybil's straw fabric (10)
15 Important phone connection broken in hotel (7)
16 He paints desperate luvvie (8)
17 Feels pain while carrying revolutionary (5)
18 Limb found in river creates expression of dismay (4,2)
20 Male members of HMRC head off to grab English guitarists (6)
22 Soldier in upturned wagon is extremely sad (6)
24 Club good for an evening out? (4)



Clue of the week: Great opera houses going under? The opposite (4)
Brummie, The Guardian

Name .....
Address .....
..... Tel no .....
Clue of the week answer: .....

Solution to Crossword 1525

ACROSS: **6** Chortle **7** Account **9** Apron **10** Decorator **11** Get lost **13** Rip-off **15** Geiger counter **19** Talent **20** Natural **23** Tiger-moth **24** India **26** Startle **27** Nigeria

DOWN: **1** Sour **2** Stingo **3** Head start **4** Scorpion **5** Auctioneer **6** Change **7** Arco **8** Tariff **12** Theologian **14** Moonshine **16** Generate **17** States **18** Alpaca **21** Twinge **22** Dove **25** Dory

Clue of the week: Slow and careful French composer reduced tempo (10) **Solution:** DELIBERATE (Léo Delibes, minus last letter [reduced] + RATE [tempo])

The winners of 1525 are Carol and Geoff Flett from Reading

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Sudoku 1,069 (difficult)

					1	4		
6	5				2			
	9			3				6
		2		8			4	
3	7						9	2
	4			1		7		
2				9			8	
			1				7	3
		9	6					

Fill in all the squares so that each row, column and each of the 3x3 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9

Solution to Sudoku 1,068

7	1	8	9	5	2	3	4	6
5	4	3	7	6	1	2	8	9
6	2	9	8	4	3	1	5	7
3	7	4	2	8	9	6	1	5
8	9	6	5	1	7	4	3	2
2	5	1	6	3	4	9	7	8
9	3	7	1	2	5	8	6	4
1	8	5	4	9	6	7	2	3
4	6	2	3	7	8	5	9	1

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Charity of the week

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